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FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

STRIVING FOR FORTUNE; OR, FROM BELL-BOY TO MILLIONAIRE.

By A SELF MADE MAN.



Fred thought it was high time for him to take a hand in the proceedings, so he crawled partially out from under the bed and, covering the rascal with his revolver, cried:

"Drop that coat and money—quick!"

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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STRIVING FOR FORTUNE

OR,

From Bell-Boy to Millionaire

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES THE HERO.

"There's a letter for me, isn't there?"

It was Miss Pillsberry, a spinster lady of uncertain age, who spoke, and her question was addressed to Fred Bowers, a bright-eyed, curly-headed, good-looking boy of fourteen, who was perched upon a worn and rickety stool behind the counter of the one general store and postoffice of the village at Alton, in the Catskills.

The store was owned by Nathan Gardner, a tall, thin, vinegary-looking man of forty, whose mean and grasping nature was in full accord with his personal appearance.

Mr. Gardner was a widower, and his sister, Miss Minerva Gardner, two years his junior, who in many respects was not unlike her brother, kept house for him.

He had one son, named Tom, a freckle-faced, sandy-haired and sallow-featured boy of fifteen, who was not a whit more popular among the boys of the village than his father was with the grown-up folks.

The other member of the family was Fred Bowers.

He was considered a dependent, and came in for the short end of everything.

This kind of treatment might have soured the disposition of some boys, but it had no such effect upon Fred.

It was not because he was a meek or spiritless boy that Fred Bowers put up with the unfair conditions by which he was surrounded.

Not at all.

Fred was as spunky and independent as boys come, endowed with true courage, which lacked only the occasion to develop.

The fact was the boy was blessed with a sunny nature, and though he was often depressed for the moment, and on the edge of revolt, when particularly hard-pressed by either Nathan, Tom or Miss Minerva, or all three together; as often happened, his spirits instantly rebounded, with the elasticity of a rubber ball, when the disagreeable conditions were removed.

Everybody in the village and for miles around knew how the Gardners treated Fred Bowers, and they sympathized with his position.

The boys wondered why he didn't run away, while the girls often held small indignation meetings on the subject, for Fred was the best-liked lad in Alton and vicinity.

For the greater part of the year the village led a sort of Rip Van Winkle existence, as if the spirit of that noted character brooded over the place.

But during the summer it woke up and was endowed with real life, for half of the people took in boarders, probably in more senses than one, and an influx of city folks made the quiet lanes and woods and by-ways hum after a fashion.

It was about the middle of May, and a very fine morning, that Miss Pillsberry came into the Gardner store to ask for a letter she had been impatiently expecting for two or three days.

She had called the day before in respect to it and had been disappointed.

Evidently from the tone of her voice on this occasion

she seemed to entertain no doubt but that the letter was snugly sandwiched between others in the box, and only awaited the ready fingers of Fred Bowers to come forth.

"Good morning, Miss Pillsberry," said Fred, pleasantly, jumping down from his stool to wait on her. "I will look and see."

Miss Pillsberry was not in the most cheerful of moods just then, but in spite of that fact she managed to bestow a smile upon the village favorite.

She looked a bit anxious, in spite of her apparent confidence that her letter was there as Fred took the bunch of envelopes from the box and began to sort them over.

At length he reached the last one.

There was no letter for Miss Pillsberry, and he told her so.

"Are you sure there isn't?" she persisted, almost sharply.

"I will go over them again, Miss Pillsberry," Fred said, good-naturedly, though he was certain there was no letter for her. "Are you expecting a particular letter?"

"Yes. I am going to visit my brother at Charlestown, and a week ago I received a letter from him in which he said he would send me fifty dollars by mail on the following Thursday to pay my expenses. I ought to have got that letter last night, or at the latest in this morning's mail. Are you sure it hasn't been put in one of your other boxes by mistake?"

"I don't think so. If there is money in it it will probably be registered. I don't see any registered letters on hand. However, I will look over the others."

"You are very obliging, Fred Bowers," replied Miss Pillsberry, gratefully. "Tom Gardner waited on me last night, and he wasn't at all nice. He wouldn't go over the other letters even when I told him that letter was very important to me because it had the fifty dollars in it I was looking for."

Fred carefully examined the superscription of every letter in the pigeon-hole case, but there was none addressed to the anxious maiden lady.

"I really don't know what I shall do if it doesn't come," she said, with a troubled look. "I will have to give up my trip. I do want to see my brother so much. I haven't seen him since he was married, six years ago."

Fred silently sympathized with her in her disappointment.

"Probably it will come in this evening's mail. I will be on the lookout for it. If it comes, and Mr. Gardner does not object, I will bring it over to your house."

"Thank you. You are such a different boy from Tom Gardner. I often wonder why you stay here when you are so unkindly treated as I have heard. I think most boys would want to make a change."

"I think I shall soon, Miss Pillsberry," replied Fred, quietly.

"Do you really mean that?" she said quickly.

"Yes, ma'am. I am only waiting to get money enough to pay my way to New York. I hope you won't mention

it, Miss Pillsberry. Mr. Gardner wouldn't like to hear that I intend to leave him, and it would make trouble for me."

"Oh, I won't say a word about it, you may depend."

"Thank you, Miss Pillsberry."

"What a nice, polite boy he is," thought the spinster as she left the store.

As Fred was mounting his stool again a very pretty red-cheeked girl came into the place.

Her name was Kittie Redwood, and her father owned a small farm near Alton.

The Redwoods took summer boarders to help out their scanty income, and consequently Miss Kittie was kept pretty busy helping her mother to wait upon them during the season.

She was about thirteen years old, as bright as a new penny, and as lively as a young colt.

She and Fred were the very best of friends, and they were always glad to see each other.

"Hello, Kittie!" exclaimed Fred, delightedly. "What brings you to the village?"

"Why, pa's light wagon brought me," she giggled.

"Oh, say, Kittie, you're too smart this morning. Did you come in here to see me or to buy something?"

"Both."

"Well, I'm glad to see you all right. What can I do for you?"

"Here's a list of the things we want. Mother wrote it out. You want to have the bundle ready when pa calls around with the wagon."

"I'll see that it's ready, Kittie."

"Are you all alone this morning?"

"Looks as if I was, doesn't it?"

"Yes. Where is Tom Gardner?"

"Gone fishing."

"Do you ever go fishing?"

"Not if Mr. Gardner has anything to say about it, and he generally does."

"I think it's a shame that you don't get more recreation."

"What's the use of kicking against a stone wall?"

"I shouldn't put up with it if I was you," replied Kittie, spiritedly.

"I don't mean to long."

"What are you going to do?" she asked curiously.

"I'm going to dig out for New York."

"Do you mean that?" she asked with a grave face.

"I certainly do. I've tried hard to do the right thing by Mr. Gardner and the family, but they don't seem to appreciate my efforts."

"That's what everybody says."

"So as soon as I get enough saved up to take me down the river and keep me a week or two in the city I'm going to make a start."

"I shall be sorry to have you go, Fred," said Kittie, swinging her sunbonnet to and fro. "Very, very sorry."

"Why, Kittie?"

"Oh, because——"

"Because what?"

"Because I like you, Fred. There now, I've said it," and she looked covertly at him from under her long lashes.

"And I like you, too, Kittie. I'll write to you when I get to the city and tell you how I get on."

"Will you?" she asked eagerly.

"Sure I will. Will you write to me, too?"

"Yes, if you want me to."

"That's a bargain now."

Fred had been taking down from the shelves the various articles enumerated on the list, and after he had checked them off he began to make a bundle of them.

"I suppose you're going to take boarders this summer, as usual, aren't you?" asked the boy.

"Oh, yes. Pa has built an addition to the house, so that we'll be able to accommodate four or five more."

"It makes a good deal of work for you and your mother. I should think."

"It does that; but we need the money."

"That's what they all say," laughed Fred. "The Chilton Farm is beginning early. They've got one boarder there already."

"So I've heard. We'll have two a week from now and six by the first of June."

"Those are the early birds."

"They're going to stay all summer. By the way, didn't I see Miss Pillsberry leaving the store just before I came?"

"Yes. She was after a letter which she said contained fifty dollars from her brother. It hasn't got here yet, and she was disappointed. She told me that she was going to visit her brother at Chestertown. The money she expects is to pay her traveling expenses."

"It will be a new thing for her to go traveling. She hasn't been away from the village as long as I can remember."

"That's right. She hasn't been out of Alton in fifteen years at least."

At this juncture Mr. Redwood entered the store.

"The bundle is all ready, pa," said Kittie, pointing to it.

The farmer nodded pleasantly to Fred.

"I suppose Kittie has been talking you deaf, dumb and blind," he grinned.

"Why, pa, the idea!"

"Not at all, Mr. Redwood. I was very glad to see Kitty. I like to talk to her."

"Oh, you do, eh? We find her a great chatterbox at home," laughed the farmer.

"Aren't you just horrid, pa!"

"I'll trouble you for a package of smoking tobacco, Fred," said Mr. Redwood, hauling out a long buckskin purse.

The boy got the tobacco.

"What's the damage?" asked the farmer, putting the package in his pocket.

"Altogether you owe us \$2.35," replied Fred, handing

him back the slip Kittie had brought, with the cost of each item marked against it.

"I guess I have the exact change," said Mr. Redwood, after dumping the contents of the purse on the counter, and separating two one dollar bills and thirty-five cents, which he pushed over to the boy.

"That's correct, Mr. Redwood," said Fred, putting the money in the till.

"Come along, Kittie," said her father. "Your mother said I should hurry back."

"Good-by, Fred. Remember you mustn't leave Alton without seeing me."

"I won't, Kittie. I couldn't think of doing that. Good-by."

The boy mounted the stool once more and took up the old copy of a New York paper he had been reading when Miss Pillsberry entered the store.

CHAPTER II.

THE MEETING IN THE GORGE.

Mr. Gardner returned from a neighboring village about half-past eleven, and soon after his sister thrust her head in at the rear door and called out:

"Fred Bowers, come out in the kitchen and fetch me a pail of water."

The boy obeyed with his customary promptness, but in Miss Minerva's eyes he had lead on his feet.

"It's a wonder you wouldn't move around more lively," she said sharply, as he placed the pail on the floor near the sink.

Fred made no reply.

He was quite used to Miss Gardner's way, and had learned from experience that it was better to say nothing when the spinster wagged her tongue.

"Come now, don't stand there gawking at me. Take that pan of potatoes and peel 'em. See that you don't take all day about it either," she snapped.

Fred got a knife and started in.

"I hain't seen Tom since breakfast," she remarked after awhile. "Do you know where he is?"

"Gone fishing, I believe."

"Who was that gal talkin' with you in the store awhile ago?" asked Miss Gardner. "Seems to me you might better be 'tendin' to business than wastin' your time gallivantin'."

"That was Kittie Redwood," replied Fred.

"Huh!" sniffed the lady. "What did she have to say?"

"She was talking about the boarders they're going to have this summer, for one thing."

"Some people will do most anythin' for a dollar," snorted Miss Gardner.

Just then Tom Gardner appeared at the door with half a dozen very small fish strung on a string.

"I want them for dinner," he said, dropping the fish on the table.

"I don't see how I kin cook 'em, Thomas," replied his aunt.

"Well, you want to find a way," he said in a surly tone.

"That ain't no way to speak to me, Thomas," she replied, sharply.

Tom took no notice, but walked on through into the store.

Fred was kept busy at one thing or another until dinner was ready, when he was sent into the store to call Mr. Gardner and his precious son to the meal.

As for himself, he never had the honor of eating with the family except on Sunday.

He was expected to remain in the store until the others had finished, and then he was called to the table himself.

What was left was considered good enough for him.

Sometimes there wasn't enough of that to more than half satisfy his healthy appetite, and as a consequence he went hungry.

Tom got his fish that day, as he knew he would, though his aunt cooked them much against her will.

For that reason when Fred came to the table he found a tolerable amount of food awaiting him, for which unexpected blessing he was truly thankful.

After supper Fred was sent as usual in the wagon to the railroad station, six miles away, for the mail, and of course if he found any express package there intended for Alton, or any supplies ordered by Mr. Gardner, he brought them back with him.

The road to the station was a wild and romantic one through the mountains, which Fred found particularly dreary in winter and early spring.

It was dark when the boy reached Undercliff Station.

The train had arrived and passed on half an hour before, and he found the mail bag waiting for him.

He left the bag that was to go down to Kingston by the morning train, and after a few minutes' conversation with the station agent, who was on very friendly terms with him, he started to return to town.

Half way back along the road he entered a gloomy gorge, where the hills towered all about him.

It broadened out in one spot into a wide plateau, and summer visitors were often told that this was the spot where Rip Van Winkle had played the famous game of ten pins with the mountain dwarfs.

A ghostly-looking tree was also pointed out as the identical place where Rip had passed his twenty years of repose among its roots.

None of the people who lived in the neighborhood believed the story, of course, but nevertheless many of them had a sneaking idea that the gorge was haunted.

Fortunately Fred was not troubled with any nervous fancies of this kind, for he had to traverse the gorge twice a day for four months of the year, and once during the other eight months, whether he liked to or not.

He rarely met a vehicle, and still more rarely a pedes-

trian at night in the gorge, so that he never looked for any.

On this occasion, however, he was a bit startled to see a solitary figure sitting on a decaying tree trunk in the middle of the plateau.

At the moment the moon was just peeping above one of the distant peaks, and its rays falling upon the motionless figure, threw his shadow half way across the road.

"Who the dickens can that be?" Fred asked himself, as he looked at the strange apparition.

The sound of the horse's feet and the ring of the wagon wheels aroused the man, whoever he was.

He started across at Fred and his rig for a moment, then got up and staggered in a kind of uncertain, tipsy way toward the road.

Fred reined in and waited for him to come up.

"Shay, boy," he said in an inebriated manner, putting his hands on the shaft to steady himself; "going to (hic) Alton, aren't you?"

"I am," replied Fred, looking closely at the man, who was well-dressed and of rather fine appearance. "Are you stopping in the neighborhood of the village?" he added, wondering if this was the early boarder at Chilton Farm, about whom he had heard. "If you are, I'll be glad to give you a lift to your boarding place."

"Just what I was 'bout to ask you to do, young man. Been out walking for my health. Got lost somehow, and want to (hic) get back. Live at Chilton Farm, but don't want to go back there at this hour looking like this—you understand, young man. I'm couple sheets in the wind. Took a drop of something strong to keep the cold off. But people don't understand that. Sure to say I'm 'toxicated. Give me hard name. Hurt my reputation. Understand? Won't do 'tall. People see me this way, sure to talk. Then news get into papers. Senator Smith drunk. Bad sign. Won't do. Now do me the favor to take me to inn at Alton. Proprietor friend of mine. Won't talk. Everything all right—see?"

Fred saw what the gentleman was getting at, and of course was perfectly willing to help him out of his dilemma.

He got down and with considerable difficulty assisted the man to get up on the seat.

The Senator had so little control over his limbs that he would have got a nasty tumble only that the boy's strong arms upheld him.

At last he got his passenger seated and drove on at a slow trot.

"Shay boy, what name?"

"You want to know my name, sir?"

"Zat's right."

"My name is Fred Bowers."

"Bowers! Knew a man named Bowers once. Shaved him from long term in State prison. Fine man, but he had close call. You look like fine boy. How old?"

"Fourteen."

"Don't shay! Big for (hic) age. Old 'nough to keep secret, ain't you?"

The Senator looked anxiously at Fred.

"What kind of secret?"

"What kind secret? Why, finding me two or three sheets in wind down in gorge. Understand?"

"Yes, sir. You don't want the fact known?"

"Zat's right. Smart boy. Remember what I said while back. Won't do to have name in papers with disagreeable facts. Understand?"

"I understand, sir."

"Bright boy! Like to reward sensible boy. Here, take this," and he offered Fred a small roll of bills.

"No, sir. I don't want pay for doing you a favor."

"Nonsense! Put it in your pocket. Plenty more where zat came from."

"I'd rather not take it," protested Fred.

"Why not?"

"I don't want to be paid for helping you out of your trouble. I am quite willing to do that for nothing."

Senator Smith scratched his head and looked hard at the young driver.

Apparently it was a new sensation for him to find anyone who was satisfied to do something for nothing.

He was afraid Fred's words covered some other motive, and the very idea made him uneasy.

Maybe the boy intended to make something by sending the news of his condition to the newspapers.

While he was considering the matter Fred drove up to the door of the Stag Inn at Alton.

"Here we are, sir, at the Stag Inn. That's where you wanted to go, isn't it? I'll call Mr. Drew, the landlord."

"Wait a moment. Promise me you'll keep secret, young man."

"I promise you on my word of honor," replied Fred.

"Good boy! Call landlord."

As Fred started to alight the Senator dropped the wad of money into his pocket.

"Got him (hic) zat time," chuckled Senator Smith, as Fred entered the small hotel. "Can't shay now I didn't reward him in suitable (hic) manner."

Landlord Drew came outside and sized up the situation in a moment.

With Fred's assistance, he guided the Senator upstairs to a room and helped him into bed, while the boy drove on down the street to Mr. Gardner's store.

CHAPTER III.

FRED HAS A RUN-IN WITH TOM GARDNER.

When Fred drove up to the store with the wagon Mr. Gardner was standing in front of the door looking as dark as a thundergust.

"What kept you so long away?" demanded the storekeeper, wrathfully.

The boy was about to explain about his meeting with Senator Smith and how he had brought him to the village and helped get him up to a room in the Stag Inn when it occurred to him that he had promised to say nothing about the matter, so he remained silent.

"I asked you what kept you so long away. Haven't you got a tongue in your head?" roared Mr. Gardner, grabbing Fred by the arm and shaking him in a savage way.

"I don't think I've been any longer than usual," replied Fred, doggedly.

"You don't think!" howled the storekeeper. "How dare you say that, you young jackanapes! You've been half an hour longer than usual. People have been here lookin' for their mail, and have gone away. First thing I know there'll be complaints ag'in me. I've a good mind to give you the blamedest lickin' you ever had in your life. I s'pose you stood around chinin' to the station agent, you lazy young villain!"

To this Fred made no reply.

"Why don't you answer me?" cried the exasperated postmaster.

"What's the use? You won't believe me," replied Fred. Mr. Gardner glared at his boy viciously.

Then he picked the mail bag out of the wagon and gave Fred a rude push.

"Take the rig and put it up. If you're over five minutes doin' it I'll skin you alive."

Fred led the horse and wagon around into the yard, and unharnessing the animal put him into his stall.

Then he reappeared before the store and began to take the boxes and other articles exposed outside into the place.

Mr. Gardner was behind the counter sorting the mail into the pigeon-holes.

Tom was seated on a soap box smoking a cigarette.

He did not offer to help Fred move a single article.

In fact, it gave him great satisfaction to see the drudge of the family work.

The more work Fred had to do the better it pleased him.

Finally, when Fred had about finished, Tom slyly kicked over a small box filled with new potatoes.

"What did you do that for?" demanded Fred, who had seen the mean act.

"What are you talkin' about?" grinned Tom, insolently.

"You kicked that box of potatoes over."

"Kicked nothin' over. It fell over itself. You can pick 'em up now and put 'em back."

"Pick them up yourself."

"If you don't pick 'em up I'll tell dad."

"Tell him if you wish to. I'll tell him I saw you knock it over."

"He won't believe you," snickered Tom.

"I won't pick them up, if he kills me, and, further," walking up to Tom with a resolute air, "if you don't pick

those potatoes up right away I'll knock the head off of you right here in the store."

Tom shrank away from him in alarm.

He was a big coward, and, although Fred had never struck him in his life, he was afraid of the stout boy, and not without reason, for Fred could have handled him with one hand.

Tom was thoroughly startled by the look on the other's face, which showed that he meant business, so he jumped up and fled behind the counter for safety.

Fred, however, was after him in an instant, undeterred by the presence of Mr. Gardner or the half a dozen villagers present.

Tom set up a roar when Fred grasped him by the collar.

"Let me alone, will you?" he cried, kicking out at the determined boy.

But Fred's blood was up.

He had already been angered by the reception he had received from Mr. Gardner and he was ripe for rebellion.

Utterly regardless of the consequences, he dragged the struggling and howling son of the storekeeper from his place of refuge over to the pile of scattered potatoes, and, pushing him down on his knees, said:

"Pick them up, or I'll make you dance for it!"

The uproar, of course, had attracted general notice.

Mr. Gardner came from behind the counter, and as soon as he realized that Tom was in Fred's clutches he attacked the boy savagely.

"How dare you lay your hands on my son, you reptile!" he roared, belaboring Fred over the head with his fist.

One of the villagers interfered and dragged him away.

"Do you want to kill the boy?" he said, keeping between them.

Fred, nothing daunted, maintained his hold on Tom.

"Pick up those potatoes, do you hear me?" he demanded with flushed face.

"Help, dad, help!" howled Tom.

"Let me at him!" cried Mr. Gardner, angrily. "Why do you interfere?"

"Let the boys fight the matter out between themselves," said the villager. "I saw the whole thing. Your son is in the wrong. He kicked over that box of potatoes on purpose to make Fred pick them up."

"I don't believe it," snarled the storekeeper.

"I saw him do it," replied the villager, coolly.

The people in the store were now gathered about the scene of the trouble.

"Did you upset that box of potatoes, Tom?" asked his father.

"Didn't do no such thing. It fell over accidentally."

"There," cried Mr. Gardner, triumphantly. "I knew he didn't do it."

"He did do it," now asserted Fred. "He did it on purpose to give me the work of picking them up, just as if I didn't have enough to do without that," cried the boy, indignantly.

"You're a little liar!" snarled the storekeeper. "Leave Tom alone, and pick them potatoes up or I'll skin you alive."

"I won't pick one of them up," replied Fred, defiantly; "not if I was to be killed for it."

"What!" roared Mr. Gardner, aghast at this evidence of rebellion on the part of his drudge.

"Tom upset them. Make him pick them up."

The storekeeper tried to get at Fred again, but the villager prevented him.

The boy then dropped Tom and walked away from the crowd, seating himself on a sugar barrel at the end of the store.

Tom got up, gave the pile of potatoes a vicious kick, scattering them about and ran out of the store.

Mr. Gardner shook his fist at Fred, and, with a muttered threat of what he would do to him later on, returned behind the counter.

People came and went for the next hour, some of them after mail and some after tobacco and sundry articles.

Fred sat on the barrel and nursed his indignation for half an hour, after which he deliberately walked up to his room, leaving Mr. Gardner to close the store himself.

The boy had reached the last straw of his patience, and was determined to leave the Gardners for good that night.

He packed up his few articles of personal property in an old grip he had acquired, and taking the five odd dollars he had saved almost penny by penny in the last two years from under the corner of the old rag carpet where he had kept it concealed, put it into his pocket.

Then he sat down by the window to wait until the house was quiet.

After Mr. Gardner had closed the store he hunted up a stout rawhide, and, burning with resentment against the boy, softly mounted the stairs to his room with the intention of satisfying his feelings.

Fred had anticipated some such move on the storekeeper's part, and had not only locked his door, but barricaded it with a heavy dresser that formed part of the furniture of the little shabby room.

Mr. Gardner swore when he found that he was balked in his amiable intentions.

He had some idea of breaking the door down, but he was afraid that while he was engaged in doing it the boy would escape by the window, which overlooked the roof of the kitchen addition, so he refrained from carrying the idea out.

Then he thought of getting a ladder and climbing upon the kitchen roof and entering the room by the window, but finally concluded to wait until morning, and then give Fred a double dose of the rawhide.

So with pleasant anticipations of what he would do to the boy in the morning, he retired to his own room and went to bed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ROBBERY OF THE MAIL.

Fred heard Mr. Gardner come upstairs and try his door, and he guessed what the storekeeper's object was.

He listened until he was satisfied that the head of the Gardner household had gone to his room, then he removed the barricade from the door and sat down to wait for another hour to pass.

When he heard the clock in the room underneath strike eleven he decided that it was safe to make a move, so he unlocked his door, thrust his head out and listened intently.

The house seemed to be wrapped in silence and gloom.

Removing his shoes and taking them in one hand and his grip in the other, he cautiously made his way along the corridor and descended the stairs, intending to leave the house by the kitchen door.

He meant to walk nine miles to the station below the one at which he had been accustomed to get the mail, and where people alighted who were coming to Alton and the immediate vicinity of the village.

When he reached the foot of the stairs, however, he was somewhat startled to see a light in the far end of the store.

He knew no light was burned in the store after Mr. Gardner retired for the night, and his curiosity induced him to tiptoe his way to the door of the passage and glance in to see why the light was burning.

His impression was that the storekeeper had come downstairs to get something he wanted, though that was a most unusual hour for him to do any such thing.

The light, a dim one, proceeded from a candle on the counter behind the letter boxes, and Fred was amazed to see Tom Gardner looking over a bunch of letters he had taken from one of the pigeon-holes.

"What is he up to?" Fred asked himself, as he stood and watched his movements.

He saw the boy take one letter from the bunch, lay it upon the counter, after carefully examining the address and weighing it in his fingers, and then return the others to the hole whence he had taken them.

Tom acted as if he was doing something he knew to be wrong, for he looked all around the store, and especially to the open doorway, in the shadow of which Fred stood, before he made another move.

Apparently reassured, he took a knife from his pocket and began to slit open the envelope he had laid aside.

"This doesn't look just right to me," mused Fred. "He seems to be opening a letter that does not belong to him. Whose letter can it be, and what does Tom want to find out?"

At the distance he was away from the spot where Tom stood he could form no idea of the real meaning of affairs, and he began to consider the advisability of getting closer,

if only to prevent the storekeeper's son from doing something he would afterward have reason to regret.

Although Tom had never treated him with the least degree of kindness or consideration, and had that very evening given an exhibition of the petty malice he bore against him, still he had no hard feelings against his young enemy and would have been ready to do him a favor as soon as not.

Fred couldn't help suspecting that Tom was bent on some mischief.

Not unlikely he bore a grudge against the person to whom the letter was addressed, and he was now working some sneaking scheme to satisfy his spite.

"I should like to find out to whom that letter belongs and then I would try to put him on his guard against the trap, whatever it is," thought Fred, as he watched Tom's actions.

Tom opened the letter and took out the enclosure.

"My gracious!" exclaimed Fred. "That looks like money."

The boy tossed the envelope and what seemed to be a letter on the counter and then, after another cautious look about the store, he began to count what Fred was confident was a small wad of money.

Tom put the money in his pocket, then took up the letter and deliberately burned it in the flame of the candle, to Fred's intense amazement.

He was proceeding to do the same with the envelope when Fred's grip slipped out of his hand and struck the floor with a bang.

Tom started as though stung by some poisonous insect, uttered a cry of dismay, and upset the candle on the floor.

The store was plunged into intense darkness, and a stillness like death fell upon the place.

Tom, almost frightened out of his senses, didn't dare to move for the moment, lest he betray his presence where he had no right to be at that hour.

He imagined that his father was coming into the store, and he knew that if he was caught there he could give but a lame explanation, which would tell blackly against him when an investigation was started about the missing letter he had just been feloniously handling.

A vision of the village lock-up, and something worse beyond, flitted across his terrified brain, and he fairly trembled in his shoes.

Fred, on the contrary, was wondering what he ought to do.

He was a bit alarmed, lest the noise might have awakened Mr. Gardner, and he more than half-expected to hear him coming downstairs at any moment.

His first plan was to retreat by the kitchen door, according to his original plan, while he had yet time; but that would be to leave Tom in possession of his ill-gotten money.

Small as had been Fred's opinion of Tom Gardner, he never dreamed the boy was capable of committing such a daring theft as that which he had just witnessed.

He was aware that Tom was a rank coward, so he determined to work on his fears and make him confess to whom the money belonged, as well as compel him to give up his spoils.

With this idea before him he put down the grip, which he had snatched up again, and softly advanced into the store, his stocking feet making no sound.

He knew where there was a match safe, so reaching for a match he struck it, and as it flared up, Tom gave a scream of fright and ducked under the counter.

Fred walked forward, picked up the candle from the floor and lit it.

On the counter lay the ashes of the burned note, and beside them the partly consumed envelope.

He looked at the superscription and was staggered to discover that the envelope was addressed to Miss Tabitha Pillsberry.

The letter had arrived by that night's mail, then, and it had not been registered.

Like a flash, he remembered that the spinster had told him she had mentioned to Tom, the afternoon before, that she expected a letter containing \$50.

So the young rascal had been on the watch for it with sinister intentions.

He put the mutilated envelope in his pocket, and, leaning over the counter, said:

"Come out of there, Tom. I know you're there, for I saw you dive under a moment ago. Show yourself, or I'll call your father."

That threat was merely a bluff, as Fred, from motives of policy, had no intention of arousing Mr. Gardner.

It had its effect, however, for Tom Gardner, with a chalky countenance and widely distended eyes, emerged from his place of concealment.

"So, Tom, I never thought you had the wickedness and nerve to rob the mail," said Fred, sternly.

"Who says I robbed the mail?" gasped Tom. "It's a lie! I didn't do no such thing."

"It won't do, Tom. I saw you. I was watching you all the time from the entry doorway. I saw you take the bunch of letters out of a box, examine them, select the one addressed to Miss Tabitha Pillsberry, open it, take a wad of money from it, which you put in your pocket, and then burn the letter and start to burn the envelope when I dropped my grip, which started you so that you upset the candle. Isn't that the truth?"

Tom, realizing that he had been detected in the act, had nothing to say in his own defence.

"Now, then," went on Fred, "what are you going to do about it?"

"If you tell dad he'll lick me," whimpered the convicted youth, in great terror.

"I guess you deserve a first-class whaling for what you've done," replied Fred, having no sympathy for the little rascal.

Suddenly a happy idea struck Tom, and his countenance brightened up.

"Say, Fred, don't say anythin' about this and I'll give you half the money," he said eagerly, diving one hand into his trousers pocket and bringing up the money which had been sent to Miss Pillsberry.

"Well, you're a nice little scamp to make such a proposition to me. Just as if I would accept a penny of money that didn't belong to me."

"No one will know nothin' about it. There's fifty dollars in this roll. I'll give you twenty-five. You can buy a lot of things with that."

"If this was daytime I'd give you a licking myself for suggesting such a thing to me. I'm not a thief, Tom Gardner."

"Ho!" sneered Tom. "You needn't be so stuck up about it. I'll bet you'd copper the whole thing if you had got first shy at it."

"You little lying rascal, how dare you say that?" cried Fred, angrily.

"Do you mean to give me away, after all?" asked the storekeeper's son, with a snarl. "You'll wish you hadn't, that's all."

"Will I?"

"Yes, you will," doggedly.

"I guess not. You don't seem to realize what a serious thing you've done. The government will take this thing in hand and make you sweat pretty lively for what you've done."

Tom turned livid with apprehension.

"Don't say nothin' about it and I'll put the money back."

"Back where?"

"Into the envelope, and I'll put the envelope back in the pigeon-hole."

Tom looked hastily around for the envelope, but couldn't see it.

Then he looked on the floor behind the counter, and on the other side of the counter, but could not see a sign of it.

"Where is it? I didn't burn it. Only started to do so."

"I've got it in my pocket," replied Fred, who had been watching the scared boy with a curious grin.

"Give it to me, then," cried Tom, holding out his hand for it.

"It wouldn't do you any good, for it was partly burned anyway."

"I don't believe it."

"Then I'll show you," said Fred, putting his hand in his pocket and pulling it out to show the boy.

Something else came out with it and dropped on the counter.

That something else was the roll of bills Senator Smith had dropped into his pocket outside of the inn that evening unknown to him.

Tom Gardner's sharp eyes lit upon the bills at once, and he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

Then a crafty expression came into his shifty eyes.

"I guess if it comes to that I ain't the only thief, after all. Where did you get all that money, Fred Bowers?"

CHAPTER V.

THE SPRINGING OF A TRAP.

Fred was never so surprised in his life at the unexpected appearance of that roll of bills from his pocket.

He stared at the wad as if it had been a snake or something of that nature.

If he heard Tom's insulting words they made no impression on his senses at the moment.

Tom, however, with a covetous chuckle, grabbed up the roll and counted it in a twinkling.

"Fifty dollars," he grinned. "Just the same as I got out of the letter," and he tossed it back, picking up the roll he had pilfered and holding it tight. "I guess you don't want none of mine. Any way you won't get none. If you tell on me I'll tell on you, see?" and he chuckled with satisfaction, as if he felt he had settled the difficult problem with which he had been confronted a moment before.

Fred couldn't help seeing that things had taken an unpleasant turn.

How had that money got into his pocket?

And such a big sum, too, for he had mechanically watched Tom count it over, and when his young enemy announced the amount he could hardly believe the evidence of his eyes and ears.

All at once he remembered the roll which Senator Smith had tried to press upon him as a bribe for his silence as to the politician's condition.

"It must be the same," he thought. "The Senator managed in some way to drop it into my pocket."

Certainly that must be the truth, for in no other way could he account for the possession of so much money.

But Tom's self-satisfied grin and half-sneering expression made him exceedingly angry.

He easily saw that the storekeeper's son believed he had obtained that money in some underhand way.

"It's a bargain, isn't it?" said Tom, with a malicious chuckle.

"No, it isn't a bargain," cried Fred, indignantly. "Do you think I stole that money?"

"Where would you get \$50 all in a lump if you didn't steal it? You've been robbing dad's till, I'll bet."

"What!" gasped Fred, startled at such a suggestion.

"You needn't pretend you haven't. But I don't care whether you have or not. He can stand it. It'll be a good joke on him, for he's closer than a clamshell, and it'll do me good to see the fuss he'll make when he finds out the money is gone. He'll be sure to say you took it, so if I was you I'd dust out at once before he finds out he has been robbed."

Clearly Tom Gardner was a model son.

He had as much feeling and respect for his father as a stone.

Fred found himself in an embarrassing situation.

He couldn't make an explanation to Tom, and even if he had felt free to do so he knew the storekeeper's son wouldn't believe him.

He picked up the \$50 wad and put it in his pocket, fully determined to return it to Senator Smith as soon as he could, though when that opportunity would occur he couldn't say unless he gave up his project of leaving the village that night.

"Are you going to return that money to Miss Pillsberry?" he asked Tom.

"Sure thing," grinned the boy. "Just watch me do it."

He picked up the envelope, put the fifty dollars into it and stowed it away in his pocket.

"I'll carry it over to her in the morning," he added.

"But you'll have to explain how the letter and the end of the envelope came to be burned. How are you going to do that?"

"Don't you worry about that," chuckled Tom. "She'll be glad to get the money without waitin' to know too much about what happened to the rest of it."

"All right. Fix the matter up any way you think will let you out of the scrape and I'll be satisfied."

Tom grinned broadly.

He felt that the fifty dollars was as good as his own now.

"Fred is only puttin' up a bluff," he said to himself.

"He wants to hold on to that money he's stolen from dad. I thought he was a chump, but I guess he's pretty slick, after all. Gee! Won't dad be wild when he finds himself \$50 out?"

That reflection evidently tickled him greatly, for he snickered loudly.

"I guess I'll go to bed," he said. "Say, how is it you ain't been in bed at all yourself?"

The suspicion had just struck him that Fred had come into the store to look at the till and see if his father had left any money in it overnight.

The fact that his father was uncommonly careful with his money, and never left any around loose, did not appear to strike him.

"That's my business," replied Fred, in answer to his question.

Tom chuckled as he moved around the end of the counter.

Fred picked up the candle and followed him.

When they reached the entry door he blew it out.

At that moment Tom stumbled over an obstacle in his path and went down on his hands and knees.

He put out his hand and felt of the obstruction.

"It's a valise," he said to himself. "Fred's valise, too. I knew it by the broken handle. So he's goin' to light out to-night. That's why he hasn't been in bed. I'm glad of it. I hate him worse'n p'isen. I hope I'll never see him again."

Tom decided not to let on that he suspected Fred's intentions.

He was afraid the boy might change his mind and postpone his project.

So he got up and began to tiptoe upstairs.

He resolved to watch, however, to see if Fred really took his departure.

As for Fred, he did not dare remain downstairs under present circumstances.

That would be altogether too suspicious.

Therefore he followed Tom up to the passage above, leaving his shoes and valise near the entry door, and went to his room once more, where he expected to pass another hour until he was satisfied Tom had fallen asleep and the coast was clear.

Hardly had the two boys closed their room doors behind them than Mr. Gardner came out into the passage in his stocking feet, and leaning over the railing listened intently.

He had been aroused by the noise made by Tom sprawling over Fred's valise.

Sitting up in bed, he had listened, not quite sure as to what it was that had awakened him.

Then he fancied he heard the stairs creak, whereupon he jumped out of bed and opened his room door just a moment too late to catch the two boys on the way to their rooms.

"I wonder if anybody has broken into the store?" he asked himself, after listening for a full minute and hearing nothing.

He determined to go down and see.

Taking care to make as little sound as possible, he descended the staircase.

Pausing at the foot, he listened again.

Not a suspicious sound reached his ears.

Then he moved forward to the entry door leading into the store.

He looked into the place, but it was as dark and silent as the grave.

"Guess I must have been mistaken," he thought. "There hain't no one here."

He started to go back and he also tripped over Fred's valise.

"What's that?"

He investigated the object and found that it was a grip. His roving fingers also discovered Fred's shoes.

"Oh, ho! I begin to smell a mouse. That young rascal, Fred Bowers, is intending to give me the slip to-night. The villain! After all I've done for him. Kept him in vittals and clothes since he was knee high to a grasshopper. If that hain't gratitood may I be—— Never mind! I'll just keep quiet 'round here and watch for him to come from his room. I'll give him the surprise of his life, the monkey! And to-morrow morning I'll lick him till he won't be able to sit down in a week."

So, with the grim determination of wreaking a terrible vengeance on the hapless boy, he hunted up a bit of candle

and some matches, and taking his seat on an empty cracker box just inside the store door, he lay in wait for the appearance of his victim.

A full hour passed and the sitting-room clock struck one before anything happened.

Then a door above was softly opened and closed and the stairs began to creak under the stocking feet of someone descending.

The storekeeper grinned savagely, and his fingers worked in anticipation of the moment when he would pounce upon the unsuspecting object of his wrath.

Whoever was coming down had now reached the foot of the staircase and had paused to listen.

Then the newcomer crept forward on his hands and knees as if searching for something.

As soon as his hands touched the valise he gave a grunt of satisfaction.

At that instant, like a bolt of lightning from a clear sky, Mr. Gardner sprang upon him.

As his talon-like fingers fastened on to the boy's jacket the youth uttered a cry of fright and commenced to struggle.

"Ho, ho, you young villain!" roared the storekeeper, with savage earnestness. "I've got you, have I? Goin' to sneak off in the dead of night, were you, thinkin' I wouldn't know nothin' about it. I'll fix you, you pestiferous little monkey! I'll warm your jacket nicely for you. When I've got through with you, you'll think you'd been drawn through a knot-hole, and a mighty small one at that."

He shook the boy as a cat might a mouse.

"Oh, oh, oh!" whimpered his victim. "You're hurtin' me. What's the matter with you? I ain't Fred Bowers. I'm Tom."

"Tom!" gasped the storekeeper, releasing his hold on the boy. "Is it really you, Tom?"

"Yes, it's me," replied his son, in a sulky tone. "You most shook the breath out of my body. What did you want to do? Kill me?"

Mr. Gardner struck a match to make sure that his ears had not deceived him.

Sure enough, there stood his son and heir, Tom Gardner, half dressed, the picture of a very much rumped boy.

CHAPTER VI.

FRED'S DEPARTURE FROM ALTON.

"What are you doin' down here at this hour of the night?" asked his father in no little surprise, as he lit the piece of candle.

"What are you doin' down here yourself?" replied his hopeful son, disrespectfully.

"I heard a noise somewhere in the house, and I thought maybe someone had broken into the store, so I came down

to look into it. I found them things yonder," pointing at Fred's shoes and valise. "They ain't got no business to be there, and they wasn't there when I went to bed. So I just thought I'd set a trap and see what I'd ketch."

"And you ketched me instead of the one you was watchin' for, didn't you?" grinned Tom, as he began to comprehend his parent's error.

"I did, unfortunately," admitted the postmaster, in a grumpy tone. "I thought I had hold of that pesky Fred Bowers. That's his grip and them are his shoes. Anybody with half an eye kin see that he's planned to run away to-night. He knowed I intended to give him a sound lickin' in the morning', so he thought he'd play a march on me, the young rascal. Well, I've been waitin' nigh on to an hour for him to come down after his things, but he ain't showed up yet."

"Better put out the light, dad, if you're thinkin' of ketchin' him."

Mr. Gardner thought this advice good, and hastily blew out the candle.

"Now, Tom," said his father in a conciliatory tone, "you might tell me what woke you up and sent you down here. There hain't been no noise that I know of, for I kept as quiet as a mouse."

Tom tried to think of some excuse to account for his actions and remove any lingering suspicion in his father's mind.

He was not very successful, and was about to fall back on silence as his best defense, when suddenly a brilliant idea struck him.

Fred had \$50 in his pocket, the exact amount that he (Tom) had abstracted from Miss Pillsberry's letter.

There was bound to be trouble about that letter in a day or two.

While he really believed that Fred had stolen that money, maybe by piecemeal from his father, it would be ever so much better if he could make it appear that he had stolen the spinster's letter, for that would relieve him of any suspicion in the matter.

He rather hoped Fred would get away, as that would simplify affairs, but still if he was caught with \$50 in his possession, he would have a hard time trying to clear himself of the charge Tom intended should be brought against him.

"Well, dad," he said slowly, "I had an idea that Fred was going to run away to-night."

"Eh? What made you think so?"

"He acted kind of suspicious like to me."

"If you thought so why didn't you tell me?"

"I wasn't sure about it, so I thought I'd watch and see if he really intended to do it."

"Well?" said his father, impatiently.

"When he went to his room I peeked through the keyhole, and what do you s'pose I saw?" went on Tom, making up his story as he went along.

"How should I know what you saw?" growled his father.

"I saw him countin' a roll of bills."

"A roll of what?" gasped the storekeeper.

"A roll of money."

"You must have been mistaken. Where would he get any money?"

"I wasn't mistaken, for I saw the money as plain as I ever seen anythin' in my life. It was a lot of money, too. He must have found it, or maybe he stole it. You ain't missed any money, have you, dad?"

"No; but if that little villain has any money in his possession he must have taken it from the till, a dollar at a time, when he got the chance. He could do that once and awhile without me knowin' anythin' about it. The thievin' little monkey! Just wait till I lay my hands on him. I'll skin him alive."

"He put the money away in his pocket, and, while I was lookin' to see what he was goin' to do next, my foot slipped ag'in the door. He jumped up and I ran back to my room. Then you came up and went to bed."

"You ought to have come and told me what you'd seen."

"I wanted to ketch him myself. After awhile I heard him go downstairs. I started to follow when he made a noise down here as if he'd fallen over somethin' and back he came again as fast as he could and ran into his room."

"That must have been the noise I heard."

"I waited for him to go down again, but I didn't hear him. Then I went to his door and looked through the keyhole once more. Everythin' was dark inside, and I didn't see nothin'. I waited awhile longer, and then I came down here to see if he had sneaked without me hearin' him, when the first thing I knew you grabbed me."

"I reckon he hain't gone yet, for he wouldn't go without his valise and shoes," said Mr. Gardner. "He's waitin' up in his room till he feels sure that there isn't no danger of his bein' ketched. I think the best think we kin do is to go up there softly and nab him where he is."

"All right, dad. You go and I'll follow."

The storekeeper started to lead the way, with his hopeful son at his heels.

Mr. Gardner chuckled to himself as he thought how surprised Fred Bowers would be when they marched in and pounced upon him.

Unfortunately for the success of this artful design, Fred was too bright a boy to be caught napping.

While the foregoing conversation was proceeding in the entry Fred, leaning over the railing of the passage above, was an interested listener to it.

And this was how he happened to get wise to the situation:

He had actually opened his door for his final trip downstairs after his grip and shoes when he heard Tom leave his own room.

He wondered what was taking the storekeeper's son down the second time, and was much annoyed by the circumstance which offered another obstacle to his escape from the house.

Going to the head of the stairs he was astonished to hear the racket which took place when Mr. Gardner pounced upon his son.

As soon as he overheard Mr. Gardner's opening words he realized that Tom had inadvertently saved him from falling into the trap which the storekeeper had laid for him, and he couldn't help grinning at Tom's unfortunate predicament.

"If Tom had gone to bed, as I supposed he had, I should have been caught sure as I'm alive," he mused. "The noise made by Tom falling over my grip must have awakened the old man. He went downstairs after we got into our rooms to see what was the matter. He found the valise and shoes and that aroused his suspicions. He guessed I intended to run away, and he stayed down there to catch me when I came for my property. He's a foxy old chap; but he got left this time all right. I wonder what I shall do? I can't go without my shoes and grip, and there doesn't seem to be much chance for me to get them now. Hello! The old man is coming up with Tom. He thinks he'll catch me in my room. I'll have to skip out by the window just as I am. No, I won't," as a brilliant idea struck him at the moment. "I'll try and turn the tables on him, after all, if I can."

Fred retired up the corridor and entered Tom's room, holding the door ajar.

Mr. Gardner and his son came swiftly up the staircase, and, going to Fred's room, opened the door and entered.

The moment they did so Fred sprang noiselessly from his place of concealment, and, straddling the banister, slid down to the entry below.

Feeling around on the floor where he expected to find his valise and shoes he discovered them where he had left them.

Slipping his shoes on, he grabbed the grip and rushed into the store.

Unlocking and unbolting the front door, he passed outside into the shady street.

Crossing the way, he passed up a lane between two buildings and came out into the street beyond.

Then he started for the road that would take him to Highland Station, nine miles away down the mountains.

"I had a narrow squeak for it, bet your life," he breathed as he put his best foot forward. "However, a miss is as good as a mile. The old man'll think I've made my escape by the window till he discovers that the grip and shoes are gone. Then perhaps he won't be mad as a nest of disturbed hornets! Well, I guess."

Fred snickered as he pictured Mr. Gardner's discomfiture.

"I guess I'd better not go near the railroad at all," he thought. "Like as not the old man will drive over to Undercliff Station in time to meet the morning train. When he finds I'm not there he may ride on down to Highland, and then he would be sure to catch me when I started to board the cars there. The best thing I can do

is to hoof it through the mountains to Kingston. It'll take time, but it's safer."

Having decided on this course, Fred walked on till he came to another road that branched away from the railroad and turned into it.

He got his breakfast at a farmhouse and paid for it.

His dinner, however, cost him nothing, as the farmer wouldn't accept a cent from the boy.

He was pretty well fagged out when he came across another farmhouse just before dark.

Here he arranged with the owner of the place to sleep in the barn for nothing.

His supper and breakfast, however, cost him fifty cents.

In this fashion he made his way down through the mountains to Kingston, on the Hudson River, where he purchased a ticket for New York by the Day Line of steamers, and was landed at the Desbrosses street dock at half-past five in the afternoon.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STIGMA OF GUILT.

When Nathan Gardner found that Fred Bowers had actually managed to get away, with his shoes and valise, too, he was the maddest man in Alton.

"It's all your fault," he raved at his son. "If you'd told me in time I could have nabbed him, and then I'd had the satisfaction of tannin' his hide this mornin'."

"Well, why don't you chase after him and fetch him back?" said Tom, in a sulky tone. "He's got \$50 in his pocket. You'll lose that if he gets clear off."

The prospect of recovering \$50, which the storekeeper felt sure Fred had abstracted in petty sums from his till, was sufficient inducement for him to make an extraordinary effort to recapture the runaway.

He hitched up his rig before breakfast and started off for Undercliff Station, as Fred had surmised he would do.

He carried a piece of rope to tie the boy with, if he caught him, as he fully expected he would, and the cowhide, also, as he meant to administer a terrible whipping to Fred in some particularly lonesome spot on his way back to the village.

All the way to the station he comforted himself with the thought of the punishment he meant to lay on the hapless youth.

The storekeeper kept in the background after he reached the neighborhood of the station, but in such a position that he could see every one who boarded the cars when the down train came in.

There was no sign of the boy he was in search of, and Mr. Gardner came to the unpleasant conclusion that Fred must have taken the other road out of Alton and gone on to Highland Station.

He hated to spend the price of a telegraphic message to

Highland, though it only amounted to a quarter, but as he didn't feel disposed to leave his rig at Undercliff and take the train he had to do it.

On the plea that Fred was running away with stolen money in his possession, he requested the station agent to capture the boy, detain him until the morning train up came along, and then send him to Undercliff, in charge of the conductor.

After the down train had passed Highland the agent wired back that the boy described had not appeared at the station, but he said he would take him in charge if he turned up later on.

Mr. Gardner waited at Undercliff for the up-train, as he had to get the mail bag any way, and then he returned to town in very bad humor indeed.

Tom, of course, was in charge of the store, and there were a number of the villagers waiting for the morning mail.

Prominent among these was Miss Pillsberry, who seemed to be greatly excited.

She had already applied to Tom for her expected letter, and he, after going over the bunch in the pigeon-hole, had told her there was none for her.

She wasn't satisfied, and while waiting for the return of Mr. Gardner she denounced the mail service in no uncertain terms to the others present.

When the postmaster entered the store with the mail bag he sent Tom to put the horse and wagon up.

Miss Pillsberry concluded to wait until the letters were distributed in the pigeon-holes before making any scene, as it was quite possible her letter might be among those which had just arrived.

She even had the patience to wait until the others had been attended to, then she stepped up to the counter and asked for her letter.

"Why, yes," replied the postmaster. "I remember there was a letter in the mail last night for you. I put it with the others in the pigeon-hole."

"I knew that it ought to be here," she said, triumphantly. "Your son went over the letters and said there wasn't any. His eyesight must be poor."

"I never heard that it was," replied Mr. Gardner, as he took the bunch of letters out of the box and started to sort them over.

Miss Pillsberry watched him expectantly as he dropped letter after letter on the counter until he came to the last.

"That's very funny," said Mr. Gardner. "I know it's here, for I put it in the box myself."

He went over the bunch again, more carefully than before.

There was no letter for Miss Pillsberry.

The storekeeper scratched his head dubiously.

"Ain't it there?" asked the spinster, anxiously.

"No," replied Mr. Gardner. "Possibly I put it into the wrong box," and he took the couple of envelopes out of the "R" box.

"I hope it ain't been lost," spoke up Miss Pillsberry.

"That letter contains \$50 I'm looking for from my brother."

"Fifty dollars!" exclaimed the postmaster. "Then it ought to have been registered."

"I don't know nothing about that," answered the maiden-lady. "All I know is that my brother wrote me some days ago that he was going to send me \$50 to pay my way to Chestertown, where he lives. He said I ought to get it by Thursday, and this is Saturday. If that money has been lost I shan't be able to go. I think the mail ought to be responsible for it."

"The government is only responsible for money sent in registered letters or by money orders," replied Mr. Gardner, who by this time had gone through all the boxes he thought might have contained Miss Pillsberry's letters, and failed to find it.

"Then you're responsible for it, for you just told me that it had come, and that you put it into the pigeon-hole yourself," replied Miss Pillsberry, with a sagacious wag of her head.

This put such an unpleasant look on the matter that Mr. Gardner, greatly disturbed by the possibility that he might be called upon to make good the \$50 if it was proved that that amount had really been sent in the letter, went over every pigeon-hole in the case, but without result.

"Someone from your house must have come and got that letter this morning," said the puzzled storekeeper.

"Nobody ever calls for my letters but myself," retorted Miss Pillsberry.

"Maybe I made a mistake in thinking I saw a letter addressed to you. Mistakes will happen, you know," smiled the postmaster in a sickly way.

"I don't believe it," snapped the lady. "There ain't nobody else in the village with a name like mine."

"Well, the letter don't seem to be here," replied Mr. Gardner, slowly.

"Then you've got to find it, or I'll write to my brother, and he'll report the matter to the postmaster at Chestertown," said Miss Pillsberry, decidedly.

"Don't do that, Miss Pillsberry," requested the postmaster in a panic. "You'd get me into trouble."

"That isn't my lookout. I can't afford to lose \$50."

"Are you sure there was \$50 in it?" asked Gardner, anxiously.

"Of course I am. My brother wrote me that he intended to send me that amount. I need it to go to Chestertown."

"I don't see why your brother didn't have the letter registered," said the storekeeper, peevishly.

"What's the difference as long as the letter got here?"

That was a poser for Mr. Gardner and he didn't relish it.

Just then Tom entered the store.

He had been up in Fred's room, where he had dropped the partly burned envelope on the floor, believing it would be perfectly safe to do so, as he felt sure the runaway had

got clean off, and there was little danger of his turning up again.

"Did you see a letter addressed to Miss Pillsberry last night?" asked his father.

"I didn't see no letter addressed to her," replied the youth, glibly.

"I don't know what's become of it. You must have handed it out by mistake to somebody this mornin'."

"Didn't do no such thing," answered his son, positively.

"Miss Pillsberry says there was \$50 in that letter."

"Fifty dollars!" exclaimed Tom, in apparent astonishment.

"That letter has got to be found or she'll hold me responsible for the money."

"Fifty dollars!" repeated Tom. Then, as if struck by an idea, he said: "Maybe that's the money I saw Fred countin' over last night in his room. I saw him pull it out of an envelope."

Mr. Gardner jumped nearly a foot as the possibility struck him.

It was much more likely that the boy had taken the money from the letter than stolen it by degrees from the till, for the storekeeper always kept a sharp eye upon his money drawer, and generally knew exactly what was in it at all times.

"Did you tell Fred Bowers that you expected to receive \$50 in a letter, Miss Pillsberry?" he asked the spinster.

"I think I did. What about it?"

"He ran away from the store last night, and Tom says he saw a wad of money in his hands. I don't see where he could have got so much money unless he stole your letter."

"I don't believe he took it," replied Miss Pillsberry, stoutly. "Fred Bowers is a good, honest boy."

"I'm afraid you don't know him, ma'am," answered Mr. Gardner, with a hypocritical sigh. "That boy has turned out to be an artful little scamp. Just think of him runnin' away in the middle of the night, after all that I and Miss Gardner has done for him. We treated him just as good as we did Tom, and this is his gratitood. It is a very wicked world, Miss Pillsberry. You can't trust nobody these days. I expect we shall find he's taken away some of our best silver in his grip. Such ingratitude is enough to make the angels weep, ma'am."

If the storekeeper expected Miss Pillsberry to sympathize with him over the presumed wickedness of his late drudge he was disappointed.

The maiden lady, while willing to believe that Fred had run away from the Gardner household, did not for a moment think the boy a thief.

She had always found Fred gentlemanly and obliging, and she knew he was as great a favorite in the village as the Gardners were the reverse.

He went to church and Sunday school, which Tom did not.

In fact, if she entertained any suspicions at all, they pointed at the storekeeper's own son.

"Was there a letter in the envelope with the money?" Tom asked the lady.

"There ought to have been," replied Miss Pillsberry.

"Then you'd better go up in Fred's room and see if you kin find that letter, dad," suggested Tom, artfully. "Like as not he throwed it away or hid it somewhere."

Mr. Gardner thought that an excellent idea, so he told his son to entertain Miss Pillsberry until he came back.

Tom watched him go with a smothered grin of delight.

He knew his father was bound to find the envelope he had dropped on the floor.

In a few minutes the postmaster came back with a face as black as a thundercloud.

"What did I tell you, Miss Pillsberry?" he exclaimed in a voice choked with rage, as he held up the half-burned envelope. "That boy is a thief and I'm going to have him followed up and arrested. That's the letter you were expectin', and the one I put in the pigeon-hole last night. I'll have to make good your loss, ma'am, as soon as you write to your brother and find out if he sent you as much as \$50; but I'll take every cent out of that boy's hide when I catch him, and send him to prison to boot. To think, ma'am, that that boy would have stung the hand that brought him up! It's almost past believin'. But proof is proof, and you hold it in your hand."

Miss Pillsberry was quite taken aback by this piece of evidence against the boy for whom she had a real liking, and she left the store presently feeling very sad indeed, though not thoroughly convinced of Fred's guilt.

CHAPTER VIII.

FRED BECOMES A BELL BOY.

One of the deckhands on the day boat referred Fred Bowers to a cheap but respectable lodging-house on West street near the dock of a big ocean liner, and after he had his supper at a restaurant on the same street he went there and secured a room.

Next morning Fred bought a newspaper and looked over the "Help Wanted" columns.

Among the host of miscellaneous classified advertisements he picked out several, either of which he thought he'd like to secure.

The one that most appealed to his fancy read as follows:

Wanted.—A bright, active youth as bell boy. Apply at Hotel DeLux, Thirty-fourth street near Broadway.

"I think that job will suit me to the queen's taste," he said, after reading it over twice. "I'll go up there, but if they should happen to want reference I guess I won't get on."

Fred appeared at the Hotel DeLux promptly at ten

o'clock, and found quite a number of applicants for the job already on hand.

Each one was shown into the manager's office, and for one reason or another were turned down in short order until it came Fred's turn.

The manager looked him over critically, asked him several questions, and finally said the job was his.

He sent for the head bell boy and turned Fred over to him.

"You don't look like a city boy," he remarked to Fred, as they stood outside.

"I've just come from the country."

"I thought so," with a grin. "Whereabouts in the country do you hail from?"

"Alton, in the Catskills."

"Up in the mountains, eh?"

"Yes."

"You've never worked in any kind of a hotel, have you?"

"No," replied Fred, cheerfully; "but I guess I can hold my end up."

"Where are you stopping?"

Fred mentioned the place on West street.

"All right. You'll live here with the rest of us. So go get your traps and report to me as soon as you come back. Understand?"

Fred said he did and started off for his grip, which held all of his worldly possessions.

When he returned to the hotel the boss of the bell boy contingent showed him where he would sleep and brought him a regulation uniform to try on.

It fitted him perfectly, much to the head bell boy's satisfaction.

"You'll wear that when you're on duty. Understand? I suppose you're ready to eat, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Come along, then. It's our dinner hour."

He led him to the servants' hall, in the basement, near the big kitchen, and piloted him to a table where several other bell boys were getting outside of their mid-day meal.

"Sit down and pitch in," said his guide. "Help yourself to what you see, and don't be afraid to eat all you want. After dinner I'll instruct you in your duties, and give you a few pointers you will do well to follow."

One of the pointers Fred received was a significant mandate to divide all tips he received with his "boss."

Failure to do this right up to the handle would lead to unpleasant consequences, said the head bell boy.

"That's my perquisite for putting you on to good things, see?" said his instructor, with a grin. "It's one of the rules of the house, and a boy who doesn't ante up gets it where the chicken got the axe. Some smart alecks, who thought they knew it all, tried to ring in their own bookkeeping on me, the chap whose place you are going to fill was one of them; but there's only one set of books kept in belldom, and I keep that, so don't waste your efforts trying to get more than is coming to you unless you get

tired of the job. Don't get the idea in your head, either, that when I ain't around that I don't know all that's going on. Now that I've made you wise to a few things come upstairs and I'll show you where you sit. I'll let a little more light into your mansard roof another time. Do the right thing by me and it's dollars to doughnuts that you'll own a hotel like this some day yourself."

"Do you expect to own one?" asked Fred, innocently.

"Sure I do. Every head bell boy expects to be his own hotel manager before he begins to shed his second teeth."

It didn't take Fred long to get the hang of his duties and the run of a city hotel like the DeLux.

Some boys naturally come to the front at once, and Fred was one of these.

Before his first month was up he had become the most popular bell boy in the house, and his services were in constant demand by the guests of the house.

This of itself would ordinarily have given rise to a lot of jealousy among his associates, and got him into no end of private squabbles, but for two things.

One was that his genial ways and abundant good nature won him the friendship of his companions, while his strong physique and evident ability to take care of himself compelled their respect.

The other was his strict accounting of the many and frequently large tips he received from the guests to the head bell boy made him a decided favorite with that personage, who in consequence became strongly biased in his favor, and helped him along in many ways that proved of great advantage to him in the long run.

Thus time sped away and Fred soon got accustomed to the ways of a big city, and he liked the life and noise of New York far better than the old humdrum existence he had formerly led in Alton.

After he had got well settled in his job at the Hotel DeLux he wrote a letter to Kittie Redwood, telling how he had come to leave the Catskills so suddenly, giving her the full particulars of the situation he had obtained; telling her how well he liked New York, and how some day he meant to own just such an hotel himself.

He asked her to write to him and let him have all the news from home.

This letter, for some unexplained reason, did not reach its destination, and Fred waited in vain for an answer.

He thought a great deal of Kittie, and her silence caused him to feel quite bad for a time.

"I guess she doesn't think enough of me, after all, to write," he said to himself some weeks afterward. "Well, I've done my part. I promised to write to her and I've done it. It's up to her now. If she doesn't care to send me any word, why, I can't make her, that's all. I did think Kittie liked me a good bit. She always acted as if she did, at any rate. I hate to have her throw me down, but what's the use of kicking?"

He was too proud to write her a second letter, and so Kittie Redwood, who was eagerly and impatiently waiting

for Fred to write and let her know where he was, and what he was doing, felt sad on her part at his silence.

She, in common with everybody else in that part of the Catskills, had heard the story which Tom Gardner had industriously circulated about Fred's wickedness in robbing the mail.

Miss Pillsberry, to whom the postmaster had made good the \$50 for fear that a complaint on her part would cause him to lose the postoffice, had nothing to say against the supposed culprit when questioned on the subject.

Although there was no doubt at all that Fred had run away, and that the \$50 had disappeared at the same time, which was naturally a suspicious circumstance against the boy, she maintained that the evidence against Fred was not conclusive.

Other people, however, after listening to Mr. Gardner's story, backed up by sundry details furnished by Tom, were of a different opinion.

In fact, about the only persons who really appeared to believe in Fred's innocence were Miss Pillsberry and Kit-tie Redwood.

Tom lost no opportunity to make the situation as black as he could against the runaway, and his efforts in this direction were more or less successful.

After a time it came to be noticed that the postmaster's son was spending more money than he was ever known to spend before.

To account for this he gave out here and there that he was now chief clerk for his father and was in receipt of a regular wage.

His unusual liberality, however, did not increase his personal popularity, and when he found that fact out he began to sour on the village and asked his father to let him go to New York, where he felt sure he would be more appreciated.

Mr. Gardner, however, objected strenuously to his departure.

Tom then grew cranky, and made himself quite objectionable to the customers of the store.

His father stood this until his patience gave out, and one night he gave his hopeful heir a sound beating.

Tom went to bed vowing vengeance on his parent.

Next morning he was missing, and so was a roll of notes Mr. Gardner had placed the evening before in his bureau drawer.

The inference was plain.

His father tried to locate him, and even went so far as to notify the police authorities of New York to be on the lookout for him, but nothing came of it.

Tom, suspecting the tactics his parent might adopt, did not come to New York at that time, but hid himself to Philadelphia, and so all trace of him was lost."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAN WITH THE OILY TONGUE.

Fred had been attached to the bell boy staff of the Hotel DeLux for about a year, and was now a fine, handsome

boy of fifteen, when he was sent one afternoon to Room 38, on the second floor, with a pitcher of ice water.

Knocking at the door, he was told to come in.

Entering, he placed the pitcher on a small marble-top table.

The occupant of the room was standing by one of the windows looking out on the street.

He thrust his hand into his pocket and pulled out a quarter.

"Here, boy," he said, holding out his hand.

Fred advanced to receive it, and found himself face to face with Senator Smith.

The Senator noticed his look of surprise and hesitation after he had accepted the money, and said:

"Well, do you wish to say anything to me?"

"You are Senator Smith, aren't you?"

"That's my name."

"I think you were stopping at the Chilton Farm, in the Catskills, near the village of Alton, this time last year, sir?"

"I was," replied the Senator, in some surprise, regarding the boy searchingly.

He did not recognize Fred, however, which is not singular, seeing it was at night he had caught his only glimpse of the boy, and he was half drunk at the time.

"You don't remember me," replied Fred; "but I recollect you. I was living at that time with Mr. Gardner, the postmaster. I was bringing the mail on our wagon from Undercliff one night and I saw you sitting on an old decayed tree in the gorge. You said you had been taking a walk and had lost your way. You didn't want to return to the Chilton Farm that night, and you asked me to take you to the Stag Inn, in the village, which I did. I don't know whether you remember the circumstance or not, as it took place about a year ago."

Senator Smith looked intently at Fred for a moment or two without speaking.

"I recollect the circumstance to which you allude. You did me a great favor, young man. I wanted to see you again, but found you had left the village rather suddenly. Can I do anything for you now? If so, don't hesitate to speak out."

"No, sir. But I wanted to call your attention to the fact that you dropped \$50 in bills into my pocket that night. Now, that is a lot of money for a person to pay for such a small service as I rendered you on that occasion. Besides, I didn't want to be paid for doing you the favor. I don't think you were aware that you gave me so much money; therefore I wish you'd let me return it to you."

"Return it to me!" in an astonished tone.

"Yes, sir. I don't think I have any right to keep it."

"Look here, young man, I gave you that \$50 to keep mum about a certain matter. In plain words, you found me partly under the influence of liquor, and I didn't want that fact to leak out. I remember now that I put the

money into your jacket pocket because you refused to accept it when I offered it to you."

"I found it that night, and if I had not left the village as suddenly as I did, I should have called on you and handed it back. I should like to do so now."

"Nonsense! I couldn't think of taking that money back. I have more money than I know what to do with."

"But, sir, \$50 is a lot of money for you to——"

"Tut, tut! Don't say another word about the matter. You earned the money all right. I always try to pay in proportion to the service rendered me. Fifty dollars was a mere bagatelle—I should liked to have given you more—but it happened to be all I had about me at the time. If you've kept that money ever since for the purpose of returning it when you meet me, you've done a very foolish thing. The money is absolutely yours, so don't worry about it any more."

With these words the Senator gently pushed Fred toward the door.

There was a small yard behind the hotel, where the covered barrels of refuse were kept, and where other odds and ends in the way of boxes and crates were stored pending removal.

An alley led from one end of this yard into Twenty-second street.

A few days later, about eight o'clock in the morning, Fred, who was off duty at that time, entered the yard and crawled in among a pile of crates close to the rear wall of the hotel.

One of the guests on the sixth floor had accidentally dropped a valuable ring out of her window and she had asked the boy to try and find it.

Fred hoped to be able to recover the ring, as it would be a \$10 bill in his pocket.

He crawled around behind the crates, and felt as far under their sides and ends as he could insert his fingers.

He had about come to the conclusion that the ring had fallen into one of the excelsior-filled crates when, to his intense satisfaction, he discovered it snugly imbedded in a small hole in the flagging close to the hotel wall.

At that moment he heard the subdued tones of a man and woman in eager conversation within a foot or two of where he knelt.

He would have thought nothing of this circumstance but for the fact that he heard the man mention the name of Senator Smith and ask his companion what was the number of his room.

"It's 38, on the second floor," she replied.

"And what floor do you work on, Sallie?" he inquired.

"The second."

"You have a pass key for all the rooms on that floor, haven't you?"

"For all on the south and west corridors."

"Do you look after 38?"

"Yes; Nellie Jones and I—the chambermaids work in pairs—do up that room."

"And I suppose the Senator tips you liberally, doesn't he, Sallie?"

"We ain't got no cause for complaint," replied Sallie.

"He seems to carry a lot of money around with him?"

"He's rather careless with it. Nellie found a \$10 bill behind the table the other morning."

"Did she whack up with you?"

"No. She returned it to him that afternoon."

"The deuce she did! What did you let her do that for? The Senator never would have missed it."

"Well, he gave her \$5 for her honesty, and she gave me half of that."

"Honesty be blowed!" growled the man. "Nobody gains anythin' by bein' honest. I tried it for awhile and came in for the short end of everythin'. Now, look here, Sallie, you want to keep in with me, don't you?"

"Of course I do."

"That's right. You're a fine girl, Sallie. I'm goin' to take you to the island next Sunday afternoon."

"Do you mean that?" asked the girl in a delighted tone.

"Sure I do. But I need the dough to give you a bang-up time. I want you to show me up the back way to the second floor, and let me into Senator Smith's room this afternoon when he's out. I dare say there's some money to be found in his clothes. And maybe I could get a peep into his trunk without him ever findin' it out. That'll put me in funds, Sallie, and there won't be nothin' too good for you on the island Sunday. What do you say?"

"Oh, I don't know, Jimmie. It's an awful risk," replied the girl, doubtfully.

"Risk be jiggered, Sallie. Besides, it won't be your funeral if anythin' happens. I'm about as fly as they come, girly, and it won't be the first time I've worked the game. Nor the second, either. You'll help me now, won't you?"

"I'd like to, but——"

"Oh, come now, Sallie, don't be squeamish. I could put my finger on several of the girls who would give their eyeteeth for the chance to do me a favor like this. There's Annie Egan now——"

"Don't mention that deceitful thing!" cried the girl, angrily. "I hate her!"

"She thinks a heap of me, all right," chuckled Jimmie.

"Do you like her?" asked Sallie, in a joyous tone, tapping the pavement of the yard with the toe of her shoe.

"Not as well as I do you. You're a good deal better lookin' than she is, but she'd do most anythin' to get me away from you. She'd let me into any room on her floor if I asked her, and give me full swing to pick up anythin' I could find. But I'm givin' you the first chance, Sallie. You stand in with me and you can put it all over Annie Egan. If I can make a haul out of the Senator I'll buy you some swell clothes, so that Annie won't be one, two, three in it with you."

"I'd like to put her nose out of joint, the spiteful thing!" cried Sallie, venomously.

"You kin do it all right by stickin' to me. If she sees

you goin' to the island with me next Sunday she'll be so mad that——"

"I'll do anything to get the best of her," said Sallie, in a compressed voice.

"That's the way to talk, my charmer. I've found out that the Senator is goin' to a caucus this afternoon at three. I'll be on hand here at that hour. You just take me up to his room and trust me, and I'll lift enough, either in money or somethin' else, to give you the time of your life and make all the other girls bite their tongues out with envy. Is it a go?"

The girl thought a moment, as if weighing the chances; then she said:

"I'll do it, Jimmie. I'll do anything for you if you'll drop Annie Egan and let me be your steady."

"It's a bargain," replied Jimmie, promptly. "After this you're the only pebble on the beach with me."

The chambermaid permitted the sneakthief to kiss her, and then the two parted.

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Fred. "That's a pretty slick rascal. He's filled that girl clean up to the eyes with soft solder. I don't believe he cares a rap for her outside what he can make through her help. There are some pretty tough specimens in New York, bet your life! It's up to me to queer his little game, and I'm going to do it all right. I'll just hand him out the surprise of his life."

Fred crawled out from behind the crates, went into the hotel and dusted himself off, and then marched up to the sixth floor to return the ring to its owner.

For this service he received a reward of \$20

CHAPTER X.

THE POINT OF THE PISTOL.

It was Fred's plain duty to notify the manager of the hotel of the conversation he had overheard, and let him take measures to catch the sneakthief and deal with the chambermaid as he thought best.

The boy, on the contrary, thought that it would be a big feather in his cap if he caught the man himself.

The question was how could he put his plan into successful execution.

His idea was to get into the Senator's room and lay in wait for the crook.

When he showed up he meant to capture him red-handed, with the goods on him, and appropriate all the credit for the performance.

Before he went on duty that afternoon Fred borrowed a revolver from one of the porters.

"I wonder how I'm going to get into room 38 when the time comes for me to make a move? To get possession of the key after Senator Smith has left it at the desk seems to be out of the question. I may have to tell the manager, after all."

One o'clock came and Fred hadn't got any nearer solving the problem of getting into room 38 on the quiet.

As the clock struck the hour there was a call on the annunciator from room 38, and Fred was sent up to find out what Senator Smith wanted.

He had a visitor in his room and he wanted a bottle of a choice brand of whisky, a siphon of seltzer and four glasses.

Fred filled the order and got a quarter for himself.

At two o'clock there was another call from room 38, which Fred answered.

Senator Smith wanted a couple of cigars of the fifty cent brand, as his supply was exhausted.

The boy noticed that both the Senator and his friend were pretty well corned and in quite a jovial mood.

Fred got the cigars, fetched the change for the \$5 bill, and was leaving the room when the Senator called him back.

He was hunting in his pocket for another tip, and not finding any loose change he pushed a \$1 bill at Fred.

"Never mind, Senator Smith, it's all right," the boy said, not wishing to accept such a large tip on top of the previous one for so small a service.

"Take it, young man," insisted the big politician. "Besides, I want you to do me a favor."

"All right, sir," replied Fred, picking up the bill.

"Get my gray suit from the closet and help me on with it."

Fred had quite a job assisting the Senator to peel off his brown suit and put on his gray garments.

After he had got them on and looked at himself in the glass he changed his mind again and wanted to go back to the brown suit.

His friend, however, objected.

"It's half-past two now," he said. "You haven't time to make another change. We must be off, for we're due at the Fifth Avenue at three sharp."

"All right, old man," said the Senator, clapping his visitor on the back. "Come along. Here, young man," to Fred, "lock my door and take the key to the desk. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied Fred, eagerly, grasping the key.

As soon as the two gentlemen were out of the room he locked the door and followed them to the elevator, where he left them boarding the cage, and started apparently for the stairs.

He hung around the corridor for ten minutes, to make sure that Senator Smith and his friend had gone; then he returned to room 38, unlocked the door, entered and relocked it after him, taking the key out and putting it in his pocket.

"Now where shall I hide?" he asked himself.

He thought the closet would be a good place, but on second thought rejected it because the expected thief might come there first of all, and Fred wanted to allow him to get down to business before he interfered.

The only other available hiding place was the bed, and

under that Fred crawled with the revolver in his hand, and then lay very still awaiting developments.

Twenty minutes passed away on leaden wings to the concealed boy, and he was getting tired of his monotonous position when he heard a key rattle in the lock.

A woman entered the room, cautiously followed by a smoothly-shaven youngish man, who snatched the bunch of keys from the lock, relocked the door on the inside and then glanced around the apartment with a sharp eye to business.

Fred could only see the lower part of the woman's dress and the man's trousers from where he lay.

"Now do hurry, Jimmie," begged the chambermaid, whose voice the boy recognized as belonging to Sallie.

"Don't you worry. No one will come here," he replied, sharply. "I watched Senator Smith and another gent board a downtown Broadway car. He won't be back for a couple of hours at least."

"But I'm awfully nervous, Jimmie," protested Sallie.

"Oh, brace up! What's the matter with you? I thought you had some spunk," said the young crook, contemptuously.

Fred worked himself forward so as to bring his face near the edge of the bed, and, judging from their positions that they were not looking in his direction, he ventured to stick his head out and take a look at the intruders.

The girl Sallie he immediately recognized as a trim, good-looking young woman with whom he had often exchanged words when they met in the hotel basement.

She had been employed in the house about eight months.

Her companion was a squarely-built man of perhaps thirty years.

He was fairly well dressed, his sack coat being buttoned up to his throat.

His movements were quick and to the point.

At the moment Fred glanced out from under the bed he was taking up the Senator's trousers from the chair where the boy had laid them.

He ran his left fingers into the pockets, but found nothing.

He cast the pants over the back of the chair, with a smothered imprecation, and then turned his attention to the coat.

The outside pockets yielded nothing, and again he swore under his breath, while his fair confederate looked on with some trepidation, for, being new to this kind of business, she was clearly very much frightened lest some accident should reveal their presence and purpose in the room.

Holding up the coat, which was a handsomely made garment lined with silk, the crook thrust his long slender hand into an inside pocket.

Instantly a different expression came over the man's face, and he drew out a package of papers and a crumpled roll of bills.

He glanced at the papers hurriedly and dropped them into a side pocket; then he turned his attention to the notes.

"This is something like it," he said, with a grin of satisfaction, for he noticed that the upper bill was a yellow back with a big 50 on it.

Fred thought it was high time for him to take a hand in the proceedings, so he crawled partially out from under the bed, and, covering the rascal with his revolver, cried:

"Drop that coat and money—quick!"

The crook started back as though he had received a galvanic shock, and glared savagely at the boy, like some wild animal at bay, while the chambermaid threw up her hands with a shriek of dismay and promptly fainted.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW FRED MOUNTS ANOTHER RUNG IN THE LADDER OF SUCCESS.

The thief mechanically dropped the coat, but his talon-like fingers held on to the bills.

As Fred wormed himself out from under the bed his attention was for a moment distracted from the crook.

The fellow made instant use of his momentary advantage by thrusting the money into his pocket and springing for the door.

Before he could touch the bunch of keys hanging in the lock Fred shouted:

"Stop where you are or I'll shoot you as sure as your name is Jimmie!"

The rascal paused.

"Now back away from that door," ordered the bell boy, sternly.

The sneakthief hesitated.

"Do as I tell you, or I'll put a ball into you. This is the last time I'll warn you," said Fred, in a tone that showed he meant business.

The crook concluded it was the part of prudence to obey this command, but he did it with very ill grace.

Fred backed up to the wall where the electric button communicating with the office was, and pushed it.

"Get into the center of the room, Mister Jimmie," said the boy, as he moved over to the door, stepping across the unconscious chambermaid to reach it, keeping both his eye and the muzzle of his revolver on the sneakthief.

The rascal had no alternative but to obey if he didn't wish to risk stopping a bullet.

Fred unlocked the door and waited.

In a few moments a knock came at room 38.

Fred opened the door and found one of his companions there.

The boy gaped in astonishment as he glanced into the room.

"Is the manager in his office?" asked Fred.

"I don't know," answered the other bell boy, with a startled look as his eye roved from Fred's revolver to the motionless girl on the floor.

His impression was that his associate had shot her, and he began to back away in great alarm.

"Send the manager up here, Billy," said Fred, sharply. "Or if he's out tell the head clerk to come up."

Billy was off like a shot, and he flew down the stairway to the office as if a mad dog was at his heels.

He certainly delivered Fred's message after his own fashion, for not only the manager, but the head clerk and the proprietor as well, came rushing up to room 38.

"What's happened here?" demanded the manager.

Fred explained the situation in a very few words.

"Go down and send our detective up here," said the manager to the head clerk.

"I give in," spoke up the crook, as the clerk left the room.

"Then put the money and those papers you have in your pocket on that table," ordered Fred.

The thief obeyed.

The manager advanced and took charge of Senator Smith's property.

In a moment or two the hotel detective appeared, and the manager ordered him to take the crook to the Tenderloin station, on West Thirtieth street, and make the proper charge against him.

"Now, Bowers," said the manager, "you've done the house a good service, and I'll see that you're suitably rewarded for your zeal."

Both he and the proprietor shook hands with the boy and complimented him on his pluck.

"Now, go and bring the housekeeper here."

Fred found that lady up in the linen-room, and she promptly obeyed the manager's summons.

"Bring that young woman to her senses, and then lock her up in her room," said the manager. "When our detective returns from the station he will have a talk with her."

"I suppose I may now return to my regular duties, sir," said Fred, looking at the manager.

That gentleman nodded, and the bell boy went downstairs and took his accustomed seat as if nothing had occurred.

The other bell boys were in a fever of excitement, and the moment Fred appeared they began to question him with the greatest eagerness.

He had very little to say beyond stating that he had caught a sneakthief in room 38.

"Then you didn't shoot Sallie Dunn?" cried Billy, the bell boy who had answered Fred's ring and afterward spread his startling impressions of what he had seen in room 38 before the other boys.

"I should think not."

"What was she lying on the floor for, looking as white as a ghost?"

"She had fainted."

"But what made her faint?" persisted Billy.

"Yes, what was the matter with her?" chorused the other boys.

"Oh, you fellows want to know too much," grinned Fred.

"Ain't you going to tell us?" they asked in a disappointed tone.

"I don't believe the manager would care for me to say anything more about this affair, just now at any rate."

That's all Fred would say, and they had to make the most of it.

As soon as Senator Smith returned to the hotel and heard what had happened in his room, he sent for Fred.

"You seem to be always doing something for me, young man. You saved \$600 of my money and a package of negotiable securities, I was so careless as to leave in my clothes, worth \$10,000. I shall divide the money with you," and he handed Fred \$300 in bills.

The boy knew there was no use of refusing the present, so he took it, and thanked the big politician.

"Tut, tut! I don't want any thanks. You've fairly earned all I have given you. I am going to keep my eye on you, Bowers. You seem to be as smart as boys come. I may be able to put something in your way yet that will be better than your present job. I like to help boys of your calibre to get on."

Next morning the manager called Fred into his office and presented him with \$250 as an evidence of the proprietor's appreciation of his services.

"I'm not doing so bad in New York," said Fred to himself that night, as he contemplated the balance of \$750 to his credit in the Dime Savings Bank. "I've only been in the city a year and started this account with that \$50 the Senator gave me up in Alton. If I keep on at this rate I'll soon become a small capitalist. I guess I get twice as many tips as any boy in the house. I think Jim Bates (the head bell boy) has got as much out of me as he's going to get. If he can get me fired now he's welcome to try it on; but it's my opinion he knows better than to try it."

Fred had to appear at the trial of Jimmie Hogan, the sneakthief, and that light-fingered individual got three years up the river for his essay at the Hotel DeLux.

As for Sallie Dunn, the management did not prosecute her as an accomplice of the crook, but simply discharged her without a reference.

After that Fred was in high feather with the house, and three months later, when the head bell boy took a job at another hotel he was promoted to fill his shoes.

Fred immediately gave his subordinates to understand that he did not intend to hold them up on tips, as had been the custom of his predecessor, but that they could keep every penny that came their way.

In consequence he jumped a hundred per cent. in popularity among his associates, who from that moment were

ready to swear by him and stick by him through thick and thin.

Fred's bank account grew more rapidly than ever now that he was promoted to the important position of head bell boy, and before the holidays came around his balance had risen to four figures, which was a very comfortable reflection for a boy not yet sixteen, who had passed most of his life as a thankless and unpaid drudge in a country store.

CHAPTER XII.

KITTIE REDWOOD.

On New Year's eve Fred Bowers and Billy Butler went to a popular theatre to see a spectacular production which was having a big run.

"It's the finest show on earth," exclaimed Billy, emphatically, when they came out into the night at the close of the show.

"It's all right. Fulger is a peach, isn't he?" remarked Fred.

"Bet your life he is. Wasn't that rag-time song, with the human rainbow behind him, great?"

"What do you mean by the human rainbow, Billy?" asked Fred, in some astonishment.

"Why, those girls, of course. What else should I mean? Don't you remember, blue calcium lights were thrown on one row, red on another, green on a third, pink on a fourth, and so on. There must have been more'n a hundred girls on the stage, and when they came to the last line of the chorus, and with Fulger in the lead, they danced simply swell! How the house did come down! Hello! What are you looking at?"

Fred had stopped suddenly on the edge of the gutter, where the snow lay in patches, and was gazing down at some object which glistened in the gaslight.

He bent down and picked it up.

It was a magnificent gold enameled badge, studded with thirty-five diamonds.

Suspended from it by two tiny gold chains of exquisite workmanship was a tiger's head, whose mouth held a large diamond, and whose eyes were formed by a pair of blazing rubies.

"Gee! What a find!" gasped Billy. "I'll bet that's worth a thousand dollars."

"It seems to be very valuable," said Fred, holding it up so that the light of a street lamp could shine full upon it. "Watch those diamonds sparkle."

"I'll bet the gazabo that lost that is pulling his hair out by the roots by this time," said Billy, rather envious of his companion's good fortune. "What are you going to do with it?" Sell it?"

"Not on your life. I'm going to try to find the owner."

"You are!" exclaimed Billy. "How are you going to do it?"

"It is sure to be advertised for in the 'Lost and Found' column of some paper. If I should miss it through that channel I'll advertise it myself in a way that only the owner will identify it."

"You ought to rake in a big reward. If it was me I wouldn't give it up unless the geezer who was so careless as to lose it came down with a good wad."

"Billy, that wouldn't be a square deal. A man's property is his property, and there isn't any law compelling a person to reward the finder of a lost article."

"S'posen there isn't. He ought to do it just the same. The chances are that anybody but you wouldn't give that badge up unless he saw something at the other end."

"I shan't refuse a reward if it's offered; but I'm not going to hold the owner up for it, even if I had the chance to do so."

"Huh!" grunted Billy, as they walked on down Broadway toward their hotel.

Next morning a notice, describing the lost badge, appeared in a morning's paper.

A "suitable reward" was offered for its return.

Billy Butler saw it first, as he was on the lookout for it.

"I wonder what that geezer means by a suitable reward?" he sniffed. "A fiver, perhaps. I'll bet that badge is worth \$1,000 if it's worth a cent. That diamond alone in the tiger's mouth ought to be worth \$500, not to mention the other thirty-five, and the rubies, which are worth as much as diamonds. A feller who can afford to sport such a thing as that must be well heeled, and should come up with the dust."

He showed the advertisement to Fred.

"There you are now. The chap who lost the badge offers a suitable reward," with a grin. "I don't take any stock in suitable rewards. I like a feller to come out and say what he's willing to give. You ought to get \$100. It's worth every nickel of it."

Fred read the advertisement.

It was signed "George Wakeley, Hotel Balmoral, Broadway and — street."

"I'll call on Mr. Wakeley this afternoon, and return him his badge, after he has properly identified it," said Fred, cutting out the advertisement and putting it in his pocket.

Fred stepped up to the desk at the Hotel Balmoral at half-past four o'clock.

"Is Mr. Wakeley in?" he inquired.

The clerk looked at the key boxes, and then said:

"I really couldn't say if Mr. Wakeley himself is in his rooms. Just wait a moment. What is your name? Does Mr. Wakeley know you?"

"My name is Fred Bowers. I am not acquainted with Mr. Wakeley. I came in reference to his advertisement about a badge he lost."

"Oh, yes. He'll be glad to see you."

The clerk made a memorandum on a card and sent it by a bell boy to Mr. Wakeley's rooms.

The boy returned with word that Fred Bowers was to come upstairs.

"The bell boy will show you to Mr. Wakeley's rooms," said the clerk, and Fred followed him to the third floor front.

"Walk in," said a sonorous voice in answer to the boy's knock.

The bell boy opened the door and Fred walked into a splendidly furnished sitting-room.

He found himself in the presence of a finely-built man, with a bronzed complexion, who looked as if he had spent the greater part of his life in the open air and under a warm sun.

His face, which bore a hearty and genial expression, attracted the boy at once.

He had the swing and freedom of the untrammelled wilderness, yet at the same time the manners and polish of a perfect gentleman.

"Your name is Fred Bowers, I believe?" he said, looking at the pencilled card.

"Yes, sir."

"Mine is George Wakeley. I am happy to know you. Take a seat."

"I called in reference to your advertisement," began Fred, as he sat down.

"Exactly. I lost a very valuable badge last evening on my way to this hotel from the Amsterdam Theatre. I set great store by it—in fact, I value it far beyond its intrinsic worth, which is considerable—because it was presented to me by the city of Santiago, Chili. I presume you found it, or represent the person who did so; therefore I will give you an exact description of it to establish my right to its ownership."

He described the badge so correctly that Fred had no doubt that it belonged to him.

"I guess it's yours, all right, Mr. Wakeley," he said. "I found it half imbedded in the snow of the gutter about a block from the New Amsterdam. I shall take great pleasure in returning it to you."

He got up, and taking the badge from his pocket handed it to Mr. Wakeley.

"I am very much obliged to you, young man," said the gentleman, evidently delighted to get his valuable trinket back.

"You are welcome, sir," answered Fred, politely.

"I said in my advertisement that I would give a suitable reward for the return of the badge," said Mr. Wakeley, putting his hand in his pocket.

"I will not refuse any little acknowledgment you may wish to give me, sir; but I hope you will understand that I made no demand on you for any reward. The badge being your property, you are entitled to receive it back without feeling under any obligation to pay me for bringing it to you. It is a satisfaction in itself to be able to return you so valuable an article."

"You are evidently a very honest and conscientious boy," replied Mr. Wakeley in a pleased tone. "I am very

glad to meet such a one in this great city, where everyone is for himself without much thought for his neighbor. Were you born and brought up in New York?"

"No, sir. I was born and brought up after a fashion in the Catskills."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the gentleman, regarding the boy with a fresh interest. "What part of the Catskills, may I ask?"

"A village called Alton, near the Cairo & Catskills Railroad."

"Alton!" cried Mr. Wakeley in surprise. "Did you know the Redwoods that live on a farm a few miles out of that village?"

"I knew them very well, indeed, sir," replied Fred, astonished in his turn.

"I am a first cousin of Mrs. Redwood," said Mr. Wakeley. "Will you excuse me a moment?"

"Yes, sir."

The gentleman went into an inner room.

In about five minutes the door was opened and a lovely little vision of chic beauty appeared in the opening.

She looked rather doubtfully at Fred, who returned her gaze with interest.

At first glance it had struck him that there was something familiar about her.

For a moment he could not say what it was.

Then, as she shyly advanced into the room and cocked her pretty head to one side, as a certain person used to do of old, the scales dropped from his eyes and he recognized her.

"Why, Kittie Redwood, is this really you?" he cried, jumping from his chair and advancing to meet her.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. WAKELEY GIVES FRED A TOKEN OF HIS APPRECIATION.

"Yes; but I'm not sure that I ought to have come in here to see you," she said with the same doubtful expression on her face.

"Why not, Kittie? Aren't you glad to see me?"

"Y-e-s; but I don't think you deserve——"

She paused and looked down at the carpet.

"Don't think I deserve what?" he asked in some astonishment.

"You promised to call on me before you left Alton, and you didn't do it. Then you said you would write to me and you didn't——"

"But I did write to you, Kittie," he said, eagerly. "I wrote to you before I was two weeks in this city, telling you why I was obliged to leave the village in such a hurry that it was impossible for me to see you."

"Why, I never got any letter from you," she exclaimed, looking at him with a different expression on her face. "Did you really write?"

"I did, upon my honor, Kittie. I waited and waited for you to answer it, and when you didn't I——"

"How could I answer when I didn't get your letter, or know where to address you?"

"That then accounts for your silence, and I thought you had deprived me of your friendship for the future."

"Just as if I ever would have done that, Fred," she answered, reproachfully.

"I did think it strange that I didn't hear from you, when we were such good friends in the village."

"And I thought you had found somebody you liked better than poor me in the city," with a laugh and a blush.

"No, Kittie," he said, with an honest ring in his voice, that assured her that his words were sincere, "I have been over a year and a half in New York, employed in a big hotel, where I see lots of fine girls, and yet I haven't seen one that I could like better than you."

"Oh, Fred, do you really mean that? Aren't you jolly-ing me just a little?" she asked, with a pleased expression.

"I have never said anything to you yet I didn't mean, and I don't think I will begin now. We used to be good friends, and I hope you won't think of shaking me now that you have grown so big and pretty, and are dressed out so fine. Why, Kittie, what are you doing in New York anyway? And you're stopping at one of the toniest hotels in town, too. I can't understand it."

She laughed merrily.

"Why, I am on a visit. I am staying with Mr. Wakeley and his wife. Mr. Wakeley is mamma's cousin."

"So he told me."

"But how came you to know Mr. Wakeley, Fred?" she asked curiously. "I never was so surprised in my life as I was when he came and told me there was a boy named Fred Bowers in the sitting-room, who had come from Alton, and who said he knew our family. I could hardly believe the evidence of my senses. He insisted that I come out and see you, so——"

"You did," interrupted Fred. "Well, I'm right glad you did, for if there is one girl in the world I most wanted to see it is you."

"Oh, Fred," she answered, blushing rosily.

"That's the truth," he said, nodding his head in a very positive fashion. "Aren't you glad? Own up now, Kittie."

"Well, yes. Are you satisfied now?"

"Certainly I am. How long do you expect to remain in New York?"

"Really I am not sure. Probably a week or so longer."

"Then you'll let me come and see you again before you go back, won't you?"

"I should be glad to have you call. But you didn't tell me how you came to know Mr. Wakeley. He's only been six weeks in New York, and before he came here he spent sixteen years in South America, in Chili. He's a civil engineer, and is quite wealthy."

"Well, Kittie, I haven't known Mr. Wakeley more than ten minutes all together—that is, up to the time he went in yonder room to tell you I was here."

"Why, how is that? How came you to call here?"

Fred then proceeded to tell her how he found Mr. Wakeley's diamond presentation badge in a gutter on Forty-second street; how he had seen Mr. Wakeley's advertisement in the morning paper, and how he had called at the Balmoral to return him his property.

"And now," said Fred in a gallant way, "I feel I have been sufficiently rewarded by having met you, Kittie, and in having our little misunderstanding squared up. I haven't felt so happy in a dog's age."

Kittie laughed in a joyous way, as though she, too, was well pleased with the way things had turned out.

Just then Mr. Wakeley entered the sitting-room with his wife, to whom he introduced Fred.

After a short conversation the boy said he guessed he'd have to go.

"You must come and see us again, Fred," said the civil engineer, heartily. "Kittie will remain with us a couple of weeks more, I guess, and I dare say you will enjoy seeing her again, as you two are such old friends," and he looked quizzically at the boy. "Now I want you to take this," he added, handing Fred an envelope. "Do not be afraid—it won't bite you. It's just a little token of my appreciation of your kindness in so promptly returning my badge."

Thus pressed, Fred accepted the envelope and put it in his pocket.

When he got back to his hotel and examined the contents of the envelope he found a \$500 bill.

"How much did you get for returning that badge?" asked Billy Butler at the supper table that evening.

"I got a bill," replied Fred with a grin.

"Five or ten?" snickered Billy.

"Neither."

"Maybe it was twenty," hazarded his associate.

Fred shook his head.

"Fifty, then?"

"No, Billy, it wasn't fifty, but if you add another nought to it maybe you'll strike it."

"Do you mean to say you got \$500?" gasped Billy.

"I do."

"Oh, come off! Show up and I'll believe you."

Fred took out the envelope and showed him the bill.

"Suffering grasshoppers! I didn't think you'd get more than a tenner. That chap is all to the mustard!"

"He certainly is a fine man. I hope to know him better some day."

"Do you? Gee! I wish you'd give me an introduction."

The boys rose from the table and went upstairs to relieve a pair of their comrades who had the evening off.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRED CLEARS THE CLOUD FROM HIS REPUTATION.

Fred saw Kittie Redwood once more before she returned to her home in the Catskills, and at that interview she told him about the charge of robbing the mail which had been brought against him by Mr. Gardner and his son immediately after his hasty departure from Alton.

The boy was naturally very indignant.

"Do you mean to say that Mr. Gardner actually accused me of taking Miss Pillsberry's letter?" he exclaimed with a flushed face.

"Yes, Fred, he did. He said he meant to have you arrested and put in prison for it. He even hinted that he suspected you had also taken some of his own property also."

"If I had known that I should have returned to Alton at once and faced him. Why, it's an outrage! Tom Gardner took the money out of that letter himself the night I left, for I caught him in the act of doing it."

"You did?"

"I did. And he promised if I would not say a word about it that he would take the money to Miss Pillsberry in the morning and make some explanation that would get him out of the difficulty. So the little rascal kept the money and laid the blame of the whole thing on me, did he? And here I've been ever since supposed to be a thief. Oh, Kittie, this is terrible! What shall I do? I'll have to go back and try and straighten the matter out. I'll make Tom confess, or I'll break his head."

"You can't do that now."

"Why can't I?"

"Because Tom Gardner ran away from Alton a year ago and has not been heard of since."

"Ran away, did he?"

"Yes; and it is believed that he took some of his father's money with him."

"I don't doubt but he did. But, Kittie, I'll have to square myself somehow with the people who know me at the village. I can't have such a charge as that hanging over my head. Did Miss Pillsberry believe I took her money?"

"No, she didn't believe that you did, though the evidence was so strong against you. Neither did I, Fred. Nobody could make me believe anything bad of you."

"Thank you, Kittie. You're a true friend," replied Fred, with much emotion. "What was the evidence that Mr. Gardner and Tom brought against me?"

Kittie told him that Tom asserted that he had seen the sum of \$50, the exact amount the letter was supposed to contain, in his possession.

"That was true," replied Fred; "but I received that money from Senator Smith, who was at that time stopping at the Chilton Farm, for a service I rendered him."

"I believe you, Fred; but I do wish for your own sake that you could prove it. That would set you right again."

"I can prove it, Kittie."

"Oh, I'm so glad," she said.

"Senator Smith is stopping at the Hotel DeLux, where I am employed, and he is a good friend of mine. I'll tell him about this matter, and get him to give me a written statement that he actually presented me with that \$50 for a service, which need not be mentioned, of course. You can take this back with you and show it to your father and tell him what I saw Tom do. In fact, I will make out a statement myself, in the form of an affidavit, and swear to its truth before a notary. That will be better. Then your father can take both documents to Mr. Gardner and show them to him and also to others in the village. You will do this for me, won't you, Kittie?"

Kittie assured Fred that she would be only too happy to help set him right at the village, so Fred got the Senator to give him a signed paper about the \$50, and he made out his own affidavit, charging Tom Gardner with the theft of the letter in question, detailing all the circumstances of the case, together with the reasons which induced him to leave Alton in such a hurry.

He took both these papers to Kittie at the Balmoral Hotel, but as she was out shopping with Mrs. Wakeley at the time he did not see her before he left the city.

She got the papers all right, however, took them back home with her, and her father used them to such good advantage in Fred's behalf that even the postmaster, who was still rather bitter against his son for stealing his money, and from whom he had not heard a word since his unceremonious departure from town, admitted that Fred Bowers might be innocent of the charge of stealing Miss Pillsberry's letter.

The maiden lady herself was delighted to learn that Fred was able to prove that he had not taken her letter, and, as she had more than half suspected Tom to be the guilty one all along, she made it her business to circulate the news broadcast.

Kittie made Fred happy with a letter giving him the results of her efforts with the papers, and telling him that no one in Alton now had the least doubt as to his innocence in relation to Miss Pillsberry's letter.

Senator Smith evidently had taken a great fancy to Fred, for when he was in the city he always insisted that the boy answer his attendance calls to his room.

As he invariably tipped Fred most liberally, the boy had come to look upon the politician as a gilt-edged cinch.

One day when Fred brought him up a box of his particular grade of Havana cigars, he turned to him and said abruptly:

"How much money have you in the bank, Bowers?"

"About \$1,800, sir," replied Fred.

"Pretty good for a young fellow of your age. By the way, how old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"Well, I'm going to put you in the way of making a few dollars."

"I'm very much obliged to you, sir."

"Tut, tut! You're welcome. Now listen to me. The city has condemned the property forming the approaches to the new East River bridge. On Monday the buildings on this ground will be sold at public auction. The tenants have been notified by the city authorities to vacate at once. Now they won't, for they are being quietly tipped off that they can remain for three months by paying their rent regularly. Only certain people on the inside know that the buildings need not be torn down for three months. These people, and I am one of them, are going to attend the auction next Monday and bid in the best of these buildings, and afterwards, when the time is up, we shall sell the buildings at private sale to building removal companies. Now, you had better attend that sale with, say, \$1,500, and buy in two or three of them. You'll be able to collect three months' rent, in addition to what they will afterward fetch at private sale. All the money you collect in rent from a five-story tenement will be clear profit, and I venture to say not a building will fetch a price equal to its actual value in old building material. You meet me on the spot at noon, and I'll see that your bids get in on the ground floor with those on the inside."

On the Monday in question Fred arranged so that he was able to get off work in time to meet Senator Smith on the ground where the sale was going to take place.

The Senator and his political friends bought in the bulk of the buildings, and three of them were assigned to Fred at an average cost of \$400 each.

The clique employed a man to collect the rents for the ensuing three months.

After his share of the expense had been deducted, Fred found that his profits for rent on the three tenements amounted to about \$550 per month.

Senator Smith sold Fred's three buildings with his own to a company who made a business of demolishing condemned structures for their material at a further profit to the boy of \$850, so that Fred cleared altogether on the deal the sum of \$2,500, which raised his capital to nearly \$4,500.

CHAPTER XV.

FRED GETS A TIP ON THE STOCK MARKET.

With over \$4,000 to his credit in the Dime Savings and Greenwich banks, Fred was eager to increase his financial standing, so that when he reached his majority he would be able to start in some business for himself if he felt so disposed.

He had heard a good deal about fortunes being won and lost, too, for that matter, in Wall Street in a day, and several times he had been tempted to go to one of the

branch offices of leading brokers in the vicinity of the hotel and taking a shy at the bulls and bears.

Prudence, however, prevented him, though he continued to make a study of Wall Street methods and talk on the subject with messenger boys and clerks who worked in the financial district.

They often poured glowing stories into his ears, and offered to double for him any money he had accumulated from his tips.

But Fred didn't care to intrust any funds to a second party in so precarious a game of chance.

"If I ever put my money up on stocks," he said to himself one day, "I'll do it first hand. Then I'll know where I'm at even if I lose."

Fred had been a bell boy about two years when one day he was sent to answer a call at room 98, on the third floor.

This apartment was one of a suite occupied by William Metcalf, a prominent Wall Street speculator, who had only recently become a guest of the house.

The broker sent the boy downstairs to bring drinks and cigars for himself and two friends, and when Fred returned with the order he got a fifty-cent tip.

During the afternoon, which was Saturday, Fred answered rings from room 98 half a dozen times, and every time he was requested to fetch up drinks or cigars, or both.

It was half-past four o'clock when Fred answered the seventh summons from room 98.

"This is what I call a good thing," grinned the boy to himself, for each of his trips to the broker's apartments, after the first, had netted him a quarter as he took the elevator for the third floor.

He knocked on the door of room 98 and was told to enter.

The three gentlemen still sat around a marble-top table in the center of the room, which was littered with papers and cigar stumps.

Their movements, Fred could not fail to observe, were very hazy and uncertain.

Evidently the drinks they had absorbed had affected their brains and clouded their thoughts.

"The chambermaid will have a fit in the morning when she sees this room," thought the bell boy, as he cast a hasty glance around the apartment.

"Look here, boy," said Mr. Metcalf, in a sleepy way, "I want you to go on an errand for me."

"I can't leave the hotel for half an hour yet, sir. I'll call a messenger for you."

"Call nothing," replied the broker, with a slight hiccup. "I want you to carry a message for me yourself. Understand?"

"Yes, sir. I'll do it if you can wait half an hour. I'm off at five."

Mr. Metcalf seemed satisfied to wait that long, and as Fred was turning to leave the room he told him to fetch up some more cigars.

Fred brought the cigars right away and received his

sixth quarter, making \$2 in all he had received in tips that afternoon from the new guest.

"Don't forget, boy, five o'clock sharp. Might as well bring up bottle seltzer with you when you come. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Promptly at five Fred knocked again on the door of room 98.

"Come in," spoke Mr. Metcalf's voice, in thick tones.

One of Mr. Metcalf's visitors seemed to be making a strong, but not very successful, effort to keep his eyes open, while the other, with a decidedly foolish look upon his face, was apparently trying to check off something with his fingers.

Mr. Metcalf himself was reaching for a paper containing a lot of pencilled memorandums, which had slipped to the carpet just out of his reach.

"Boy, pick up paper, will you?"

Fred recovered it and handed it to him.

The broker held it before his eyes and seemed to be studying it.

Then he got up in an unsteady way, took up a glass and started to fill it with seltzer from the siphon Fred had brought with him, according to orders.

Mr. Metcalf, quite unconscious of the force he was releasing, pressed the lever down hard.

The liquid struck the bottom of the glass like a bullet from a pistol and an artificial geyser immediately resulted.

The stream of seltzer flew in the direction of the sleepy visitor and struck him full in the mouth.

The shock aroused him so suddenly that he tipped backward, chair and all, and measured his length on the carpet.

Fred hastened at once to his assistance and helped him back on his chair, taking his handkerchief from his pocket and wiping away the moisture which had drenched his collar and necktie.

Mr. Metcalf looked astonished at the havoc he had created, while the other gentleman laughed heartily, as if he thought the accident awfully funny.

The broker had dropped the memorandum on the floor again and was examining the metallic top of the siphon as if he thought it was out of order.

He saw the paper on the floor and once more asked Fred to pick it up, which the boy did.

There was a small fancy desk in a corner of the room, and toward this Mr. Metcalf turned.

He opened out the flap and seated himself before it.

Taking a sheet of note paper, he started to write something on it, but his efforts in this direction were not satisfactory to him.

After spoiling a couple of sheets he turned around and motioned to Fred.

The boy went over to see what he wanted.

"Sit down and write few words for me, young man."

Fred took the chair the broker vacated.

"Write as I dictate."

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. John Fisher, No. 128 West — street, city. Got that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Buy P. & M., Monday, without fail. Go your limit. No risk. Sure thing. Sure to go to par inside ten days. Got that down?"

"Yes, sir."

"Give me pen and I'll sign it."

The broker sprawled his signature at the bottom of Fred's writing and then he told the bell boy to address an envelope to Mr. Fisher, put the note inside and seal it up.

Fred obeyed.

"That's all," said Mr. Metcalf. "Here's a dollar. Take note to Mr. Fisher right away."

The boy went to his room, changed his uniform for his every-day clothes, and then started on his errand, jumping on board a Broadway car.

"I wonder what he meant by 'Buy P. & M., Monday, without fail?'" mused the boy.

Then, like a flash, the meaning of those words formed itself in his brain.

"Why, that must be a stock tip Mr. Metcalf is sending some friend or business associate. P. & M. are the initials of some railroad whose shares are about to advance in the market. Mr. Metcalf probably has inside information on the subject. By George! I'll bet I've hit it. I'll just make a note of those initials. I would not be at all surprised but I have got on to a good thing. The stock, according to the broker, is sure to go to par inside of ten days. I wonder what it is selling at now? I can find that out in the morning. I think I see the chance to make a small wad myself."

At length the street on which Mr. Fisher lived was reached, and the boy left the car.

Fred found No. 128 to be an imposing brownstone front.

He mounted the steps, rang the bell and asked for Mr. Fisher.

The gentleman was in his library.

Fred delivered the note into his hands, and a few minutes later was on his way back to the hotel.

CHAPTER XVI.

FROM BELLBOY TO MILLIONAIRE.

Next morning Fred looked up the market report of the previous day's operations at the Stock Exchange, and found that P. & M. was ruling at 66.

"If I see Senator Smith to-day I'll ask his advice on the subject. If he thinks well of it, why he can go in, too, and get a rake-off. He's been pretty good to me, and I'd like to put something in his way."

After dinner he found that the politician was in his room, so he went up and knocked at his door.

He was told to enter.

"Hello, Bowers. What can I do for you?" asked the Senator genially.

"I want to ask your advice about a little speculation I'm thinking of going into."

"A speculation, eh? Let's hear what it is."

"Mr. Metcalf, the broker, who has suite 98 and 99, on the floor above, sent a note by me to a friend yesterday afternoon advising him to buy a certain stock which he said would advance rapidly before the end of next week."

"That's it, eh?" said the Senator, becoming interested. "What was the name of the stock?"

"P. & M., sir."

"How came you to see the contents of the note?"

"I wrote it for him."

"Why didn't he write it himself?"

"He couldn't. He was not feeling well."

"Who was this person, if it isn't a confidential matter?"

"I don't think I ought to mention names. He had promised the tip, and I guessed from his manner that he was expecting it. At any rate, he seemed greatly pleased when he read the note, and he told me to tell him he'd use the tip. He told him to go the limit on it."

"Look here, Bowers, this may be a good thing. If it is I'd advise you to see it through. You wait till to-morrow night. I'll see what I can find out about that stock to-morrow. If it looks to be the correct thing I'll go long myself a few thousands and I'll give you ten per cent. of my winnings in acknowledgment of your letting me in on it. You can also put up all your pile on a ten per cent. margin. But don't do a thing till you hear from me."

"All right, sir. I'm much obliged."

Next evening Senator Smith took Fred aside and told him to buy the stock.

On Tuesday morning the boy, after figuring that he would require \$3,960 to hold 600 shares of P. & M. on a margin of ten per cent., drew the money from his two banks, took it around to the uptown office of Gage & Co., stock brokers, and put it up on the stock with all the nerve of an old-timer.

The Senator had informed him that he had purchased 5,000 shares for himself down in Wall Street.

Next day P. & M. went up to 68.

On Thursday the stock closed at 73.

Friday morning the stock began to attract such attention at the Exchange that it went up with a rush to 80 before business closed for the day.

Saturday morning it opened at 81 5-8 and closed at 90 at noon.

P. & M. reached par Tuesday morning and Fred rushed over to Gage & Co. and ordered them to sell the stock.

The clerk telephoned to the Exchange and in fifteen minutes Fred was out of it and at liberty to figure up his profits.

Next morning he got his statement and a check for something like \$24,000, of which four-fifths represented his profits.

Senator Smith cleared \$165,000 on the deal, and he insisted on Fred accepting \$16,500 in return for the tip.

Thus the bell boy found that he was worth about \$41,000.

It wasn't very long afterward before Fred overheard two real estate men talking about the land boom on Long Island.

"We ought to make a good thing out of it," said one of the men. "It can be bought for something less than \$1,000 an acre, and should net us five or six times that amount. We'll have to take the whole thirty-five acres."

"We can get it for a third down, I suppose?" remarked his companion.

"No. It's spot cash, but we can get a loan of \$20,000 on it."

They decided to try and raise enough money to buy the land, then form a company to get the necessary capital for improvements, advertising and other expenses.

Fred had been thinking of investing his money in real estate, and he thought he would consult Senator Smith on the subject.

He repeated to the politician the conversation he had overheard, and once more asked his advice.

The Senator found that owing to the newly projected transit facilities the property Fred had told him about was almost certain to become very valuable in a few years, so he decided to take a thirty-day option on the land in his own name in the boy's interest, pending the necessary legal arrangements to have a guardian appointed for the bell boy.

Before the time limit was up the Manhattan Trust Company became Fred's guardian and purchased the property for him for \$33,000.

The company received an offer of \$40,000 for the property inside of a month, but Fred had no idea of disposing of it.

During the fall Fred paid a visit to Alton, or rather he stopped with the Redwoods on their farm for two weeks and had the time of his life there.

He told Mr. Redwood and Kittie how well he was making out in the world.

"What will you ever do with so much money if you make it?" asked Kittie, with a smile, after her father had left the room.

"When I'm married I guess my wife will find use for some of it."

"Married!" exclaimed the girl, her face changing. "Have you a girl in view?"

"I have," he replied promptly.

Miss Redwood became very sober and changed the conversation.

"You haven't asked me who she is," said Fred, slyly.

"Some New York girl, I suppose," she replied, with a slight toss of her head.

"New York State girl—yes. But I'm not sure whether she'll have me when the time comes."

"Oh, I guess she will if you have plenty of money," retorted Kittie.

"I had an idea, Kittie, that money wouldn't make any difference with you."

"It won't. If I liked a man well enough to marry him I wouldn't care whether he was rich or not," she said in a tone which showed she meant it.

"That's what I thought, Kittie. Now, supposing I tell you this girl's name, will you keep it quiet?"

"I am not very curious on the subject," she replied, with a little frown.

"Well, you said that pretty decidedly."

"I meant it."

Fred drew a pencil from his pocket and wrote something on a card.

"There's the only girl I care a cent for in this world, and she's the only girl I mean to marry. Read it."

"No. I don't want to know anything about her."

She threw the card on the table and walked over to the window.

He followed her after picking up the card.

"Are you jealous, Kittie?" he asked, putting his arm around her waist.

"No, I'm not jealous," she said, swinging away from him. "I don't care."

"You're crying, Kittie," he said, softly.

"I'm not."

"Yes, you are. Why don't you read the card?"

"Because I don't care to," with an angry sob.

"Allow me to read it for you. The words on that card are 'Kittie Redwood, the sweetest girl in all the world.'" She looked up in surprise.

Then she snatched the card out of his hand and read it.

"Kittie, will you marry me some day?" asked Fred, eagerly.

"Do you mean that, Fred?" she said, with swimming eyes.

"I do."

"Then my answer is—yes."

"That is all I wanted to know, Kittie. That is what brought me to the Catskills."

He pulled her head down on his shoulder and kissed her.

A few months later Fred ceased to be a bell boy at the Hotel DeLux.

He was promoted behind the desk.

On his twentieth birthday he was formally accepted by Mr. Redwood as his prospective son-in-law, and Kittie declared she was the happiest girl in the world.

On Fred's return to New York he received through the trust company an offer of \$75,000 for his Long Island property.

He decided to accept it, and when the money was paid over he wrote Kittie that he was now worth over \$100,000.

About this time Mr. George Wakeley paid another visit to New York.

His chief object was to raise additional capital for the

purpose of enlarging the operations of a gold and silver mine in Chili in which he had the controlling interest.

He learned that Kittie and Fred were engaged to be married, and he invited the boy, for whom he had a great liking, to dine with him at the Balmoral Hotel.

Fred accepted, and after Mr. Wakeley had found out how successful Fred had been he offered the boy a half interest in the mine for his \$100,000.

Fred accepted his offer at once, and arrangements were set on foot to carry out Mr. Wakeley's plans.

"I don't thank you a bit for taking Fred away from me, Cousin George," said Kittie tearfully, when Mr. Wakeley and Fred, who had resigned from the Hotel DeLux, much to the regret of the proprietor and permanent guests alike, paid a flying visit to the Redwood Farm previous to their departure for South America.

"I dare say you are dreadfully down on me, Kittie," replied the gentleman, soothingly. "But I assure you both Clara and myself will take the best of care of him. Two years won't be long for you to wait, little one. Then he will come after you. By that time he ought to be a very wealthy young man."

"I don't care whether he's wealthy or not, Cousin George. I would marry Fred if he didn't have a dollar."

Fred and Kittie had a very tender parting, and the girl cried for a whole week after he had gone back to New York.

Then Wakeley and Fred sailed for Chili, remaining away two years, after which they came back, Fred having become a millionaire.

It was a very pretty wedding that took place in the Alton Methodist Church, and under a sunshiny sky Fred and Kittie became man and wife.

One of the first to wish the newly-wedded couple long life and happiness was Miss Tabitha Pillsberry, who sent Kittie a sofa pillow embroidered by her own hands.

Senator Smith was also present, and acted as best man for Fred.

He presented the bride with a necklace of pearls.

On their wedding trip they stopped at the Hotel DeLux in New York.

"In my striving for fortune, Kittie," he said to his wife that night, "it seems to have been but a step that I took from bell boy to millionaire."

THE END.

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